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## **THREE MEN AND A MAID**

K. H. G.  
M. G.





# THREE MEN AND A MAID

BY  
ROBERT FRASER

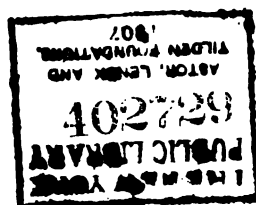


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# *Three Men and a Maid*

## CHAPTER I

### THE TROUBLING OF THE WATERS

“**A**FTER your experience of the pomp and glitter of life in the outer world, I wonder that you should be content to come back to Hudston,” said Philip Warren.

“After your experience of the humdrum life of Hudston, I am equally surprised that you should be content to remain in it,” retorted Marjorie Neyland.

“But you are a woman, to whom, being a woman, fashion and society are breath and heart’s blood. You are, to say the least, out of place here, and in an inn.”

“And you, if you were half the man you look, would refuse to pass the great days of youth poring over musty volumes, at a vicarage.”

“I do nothing of the sort. One has unoccupied hours, of course, which certain of my acquaintances employ more robustly, but there is no man in Hudston who pursues sport with greater zest than myself. Do you believe I should be master of the Ure Valley Otter Hounds if I were the mere book-worm you think me?”

“I see,” said Marjorie, pretending to be much impressed. “How stupid of me!”

“But why ‘stupid’? That word surely does not apply, since you have not lived long enough in Hudston.”

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"Sorry," she cried, dropping her eyes. "I made the mistake of imagining that advice suitable for the goose might be reasonably good for the gander."

Philip Warren laughed. He caught his pretty companion by the hand to help her over a stile which he had vaulted lightly.

"A fair hit, Marjorie," he admitted. "But don't let us quarrel. That is a rustic form of flirtation, an unpardonable thing."

He did not notice the quick smile which lit the girl's face. It was on the tip of her tongue to offer some comment, but she forbore, and pressed up the path which rose steeply in front in silence for a few moments. Though she had not known Philip Warren many days, and his character was somewhat of a sealed book to her, a book rarely illuminated and couched in a script at once scholarly and elegant, she had an intuitively accurate glimpse of its nature. He was not as other men. His very appearance held in it a complex suggestion of the study and the veldt. In ten years' time, if unmarried, this stalwart youth might be either a recluse, engaged in collecting first editions, or a leader of some desperate enterprise of commerce or empire in a land as yet unknown.

Marjorie sighed, and not because of the stress of the hill. In fact, the thought occurred to her that Philip Warren ought to choose a career before he chose a wife. When she spoke again, she broached a less personal topic.

"You have not yet told me why we are going to Fennell's Tower," she said, glancing at a squat, graystone tower which crowned the low hill a hundred yards away.

"No; how could one think of antiquity when one saw such a dainty maid approaching? I deemed you the



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Spirit of the Heather. It seemed to me that the gracious moorland had suddenly transmuted its radiant charm into the form of a girl in a tweed dress and a Tam o' Shanter. I suppose your artistic training is responsible for that touch of vivid color? It reminds me of Turner's basket of oranges on a Thames barge."

"Well, I like that!" cried she, purposely misunderstanding him, though the light which leaped to her eyes when she bent her head showed that her own words were not without a double significance.

"I spoke first of the individual, then of the trick," he said severely. "You are frivolous to-day, my lady."

"I pray your pardon, my lord. But you are to blame. I asked you, in all gravity, who was Fennell, and why did he have a tower?"

"Fennell was a mere accident, a misanthropic bumpkin who lived there for years, and thus achieved the immortality of the Ordnance Map. The tower, more correctly known as a broch, was built by the Romans, or, at any rate, the present structure marks the site of a fortified camp on the old Roman road from Dunsley to York. Its more recent purpose was to house the watchmen who gave warning of a border foray to the dale-dwellers. Its present use will be to serve as a center whence I can lecture you on the antiquities of the Vale of Ure."

Though Marjorie, strange to say, was interested, lectures of that sort are apt to be dull to other people. So more may be learnt of the lives and fortunes of those who were destined to play leading parts in the strange drama which the remote Yorkshire village of Hudston was then preparing for the stage of reality, if heed be paid to another conversation held on that same moor a few days later.



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A man and a woman were standing near a clump of somber firs on the other side of the valley to that commanded by Fennell's Tower. The man had the air and semblance of an aristocrat; the woman was a curiously countrified and coarsened copy of Marjorie Neyland. She was, in fact, her elder sister, and, in sharp contrast with Marjorie's habitual good-humor, Hannah Neyland was in a bad temper, which she did not scruple to express either in word or manner. And the talk was of her sister, too.

"She has only come here to upset the whole place," said she, viciously stabbing a hole in the turf with her umbrella-tip. "She might have stayed where she was in London, studying her 'Art,' and not been missed, I'm sure! But from the day she put her foot back in Hudston, everybody seems to have taken leave of their senses. . . ."

"Did you ever happen to hear of a certain Helen of Troy?" asked James Courthope, fingering the end of his blonde beard.

"I've heard the name, I think," answered the frowning Hannah. "Who was she?"

"A young lady with a classic nose, Hannah, and no doubt a naughty little fire in the corner of her eye; and because of these, a city was sacked, and many souls of heroes were sent down to — you know where. It isn't an unusual thing. But we don't want it going on at Hudston on the Yorkshire moors, do we? Why the deuce couldn't your aunt leave Miss Marjorie to pursue her bright career in the wilds of Bayswater, without bringing her here upon us all in this way?"

"Well, Marjorie is my sister," pouted Hannah, ready to quarrel on any pretext. "I don't want to say anything against her, seeing that I'm five years older than she —"

## *The Troubling of the Waters*

"How many years?" asked James Courthope, bending towards her with a smile.

"Five or six," said Hannah. "Something like that; she is just twenty-one."

"Ah, I thought it couldn't be eight," purred the man. "Yet your mother told me eight."

"Mother did . . . ? Mother has far too much to say, if you ask me! But that's neither here nor there. I only meant that I *am* Marjorie's sister, and don't want to go against her, though she'd put mischief into a saint with her airs and graces. I'm not a bad sort. I call anybody to witness that I was glad to see her when she arrived, though I hadn't seen her for so long that I could hardly be expected to have quite a sister's feelings; but I was prepared to make the best of my fine lady, till I found out that the Greyhound Hotel isn't good enough for her. And her sister isn't good enough, her father and mother, and even Aunt Margaret, who's done all for her, are no equals of hers. Look here! — but I won't say any more."

"You will presently," said Courthope, with his soft voice and irritating smile. "That is one of the reasons why I admire you, Hannah, because you *do* say things."

"Admire me, is it?" was the retort. "That is what you tell me, but people are saying now that it isn't only the other two who are crazy in love with Marjorie, but you as well. It is all the talk in the village that on Wednesday, when she went out for her early morning walk, you followed her half a mile down Hewersfield Lane and over the moor, for Mike Malcolm saw you, and kept an eye on you, and now everybody is saying —"

"You are not to believe any such nonsense, Hannah,"

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her companion broke in with a sudden sharpness. "You know that it is a case of you first with me. Why, you are quite as nice as Marjorie, in your way! I am sure the little parcel must envy that fine figure of yours, and though you may be two or three years the elder, take you feature by feature, and you are her image — you dark, of course, and she fair — but the same fine profile, the same sweet mouth, showing all the pretty teeth when you laugh, the same dimpled chin —"

"Hark at this!" laughed Hannah, though pleased enough for the instant, "he wants to make out now that I am a beauty like Marjorie. Is that it?"

"Feature for feature," said Courthope; "of course, your sister is exceedingly elegant —"

"Is she? Can't see it myself," murmured Hannah.

"Well, a bit stylish — certainly — from the male point of view, as either Philip Warren or my good cousin Robert would tell you; but, for my taste, give me the dark type! Hannah is the girl for my money."

"Oh, as for you," said Hannah, "one never knows whether you are mocking, or in earnest."

"Wait until I am Squire Courthope, and see whether Hannah, the innkeeper's daughter, does not become a great lady."

"So you say now, and when will that be? The Squire must be four or five years younger than you — they say he's only just thirty — and there's no reason why he should die before you. Besides, he's sure to get married, as people do — I don't say to Marjorie, for that would be far-fetched; and then there would be an heir—"

"If he doesn't marry Marjorie Neyland, he never

## *The Troubling of the Waters*

marries," said the man, turning to look at the turrets of a mansion on a distant slope.

"But why not?"

"Lack of time, Hannah; the registrar of deaths, you know. Men like my own Robert are growths marked to be cut down next year. Of their allotted span they live a year in a month, and there's nothing slow about their life except the knells at its end. The muscles of the heart, you know — soft, soft as that chiffon round your neck. Robert looks like a stud-bull, eh? But the man is hollow at the core — not worth *that*. There's a destiny, Hannah, that casts an evil eye upon some men, and brings things about."

"Well, no doubt he does get through some drink in the course of the day."

"Not forgetting the course of the night; and if you add the fact that no other man in Yorkshire ever dreams of running such scatter-brain risks, you will have discovered some fairly good reasons why my Robert will never have any heir but me, unless he happens to marry Marjorie now."

"Oh, as for that," cried Hannah, vehemently, "don't talk of such a thing. Why, all Yorkshire wouldn't hold her! She would be wanting to make me her scullery-maid! It would be good, that!"

"Yet you must understand, Hannah," said James Courthope with a chilling emphasis, "that this thing is going to be — unless, perhaps, Marjorie rejects him."

"*She!* Reject Squire Courthope!"

"That is my only chance. She *may* reject him, for she seems to me to be in love with Philip Warren."

"The cheek of her, to think of a gentleman like Mr.

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Warren!" muttered Hannah. "If it's not one it's the other. Anyway, she'd never dream of refusing the Squire. It would be more than her place is worth, for the Greyhound would become too hot for her when father and mother and Aunt Margaret heard such a thing. But then, that's all talk. The Squire is only having a game with her, I suppose?"

"That is exactly why you are here to meet me this afternoon, Hannah," came the measured words, "in order to learn that very thing — Robert is *not* 'having a game' with Marjorie. Robert means business; and, if you are right in saying that Marjorie dares not refuse him, then this marriage is going to take place, unless we two can somehow prevent it."

The woman's handsome if vixenish face took on quite a look of scare at this prospect of seeing her sister queening it at Edenhurst Court.

"My goodness!" she cried, "to think that a few London airs and graces should make such a difference to a girl's life! But I can't believe it! How do you know that the Squire really wants her?"

"I have been certain of it for two days," answered Courthope. "His first intention, of course, was merely a pastime. Robert meant to chuck Marjorie under the chin, and kiss her, robustiously, but, in attempting it, he experienced an electric shock. Sister Marjorie knows how to do these things, apparently. She waxed tall in her tiny shoes, and, for once in his life, Mr. Robert was awed. The great baby has given me the whole history of it. It took place on the little path between the vicarage shrubbery and the Greyhound orchard three weeks ago last Thursday, and he says that she looked like ordering him

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to have his head removed. But it was his heart, of course, that the fool lost, then and there — or rather the next day when he met her going home from organ-practice at the church, and she smiled, and gave him 'the little gloved hand,' and graciously promised to be friends during his good behavior. Oh, she's a dangerous species of fairy, beyond a doubt. She bewitched him then and there; and now he swears that he'll wed her. Brandy and Marjorie — those two now make his heaven, and you might as well reason with that pale moon. They have met only three times since, but those meetings have settled him. Besides, he has heard her playing the organ with Warren, and seen her at tennis at Dr. Marston's. The man's mad of it. He came to me in the billiard-room near one o'clock this morning, red as those honeysuckle berries, leering like a satyr, and he poured it all out to me; 'Jimmy,' he says, 'I'll marry her! I've got it all planned out here in my noddle, and who lives will see. She may kick up her heels, and she may stick it on as much as she likes, but wed her I will; she's the one thing under the sun that can keep me from the drink now, and if I don't get her, the drink will get me, Jimmy, the drink'll get me.' 'My good fellow,' I said to him, 'you are too old to build castles in the air. The drink has collared you already, and you do very well with it.' 'No, Jimmy,' he said, with his hand on my shoulder, 'the drink is bad, the drink is the devil — let us look at facts in their true light. A man should be a gentleman; a man should go in the good old way, and be able to stand foursquare to his life. And Marjorie is stronger than wine, Jimmy. The day she puts her little hand into mine, and says she is mine for the rest of the trip, you'll see R. C. a changed

### *Three Men and a Maid*

man; and that will be within three days from now, as sure as I'm a living man.' So you may expect a visit at the Greyhound to-morrow, Hannah, if not to-night, and things are driving fast to a head. Can *you* bear to see it?"

"I can't," whispered Hannah, almost in tears, "for it isn't fair. One might say that I'd be proud to see my sister lady-of-the-manor, but why has she come back to Hudston?"

"You'd be prouder to be the lady of the manor yourself, Hannah. And that is your prize if we two succeed in quashing this madness of Robert's. It mustn't be! If my wits crack, if I have to take seven devils into council, I'll hit upon a plan to stop it. Are you in with me? Are we together through thick and thin?"

Hannah glanced round through the gathering gloaming, for the sun had now set, and she paled a little, but murmured the word "yes," with her head bent. Courthope, then, making a step nearer, slipped his arm around her waist, upon which she suddenly threw up her face, and returned his kiss with passion.

"So it's the two of us, girl?" he said.

Again she whispered a "yes" full of fear.

"You are not a bad little lot," he said, by way of rallying her back to more confident mood.

"You do love me a bit?" she asked.

He gave her a reassuring hug.

"You'd much rather have me than Marjorie?"

"How can you put that question — to me?"

"If ever I find you hankering after Marjorie, I shall hate you, hate you, hate you!"

"Come, come! Pull yourself together. It is you and

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I against the world, I tell you. Our way won't be a very straight one, perhaps, but sometimes one *has* to go crooked. You won't mind that?"

"Not with you, for I love you, James."

"Agreed, then. What do you propose to do?"

"I don't know. I leave it to you. I know too well that if you make up your mind you will have your way, for you are one of those. The first time I saw you in the Commercial Room, sitting at the table with a newspaper, four years gone, I said inside myself, '*There's a man.*' From that minute you could have told me to do anything, and I would have gone and done it."

"Is that so?" asked Courthope, smiling. "Who would have guessed such a turmoil was going on inside the female mechanism! But now, you understand, Hannah — action is the word! You see, of course, the salient fact of the situation in our favor. Marjorie and Philip Warren are in love; we must get them married in a hurry."

"Marjorie and Mr. Warren?" cried Hannah, unable to shake off her spite. "Who is Marjorie, to be marrying a gentleman like Mr. Philip Warren?"

"Be quiet, Hannah," said Courthope, more roughly than he had yet spoken. "Let me tell you, my girl, that you are in a state of morbid jealousy of your sister, and that this jealousy may chance to spoil everything. Women are like that; they are blind to the obvious. But I desire to instil into my Hannah the rationality of a man's mind. Sentiment has nothing to do with this matter. I say that Warren and Marjorie should marry in a hurry —"

"I heard you, quite plainly," broke in Hannah, withdrawing herself a little. "How can such a thing be brought about? Why, Mr. Isambard would turn Mr.



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Warren right out of the vicarage. They say already that the vicar isn't too good friends with his nephew, because Mr. Warren is such a dreamer, and all that —"

"Don't trouble your pretty head with points that don't concern you," said Courthope. "Do you care a pin whether Mr. Isambard turns Warren out of the vicarage or not? I was about to say that I think I see my way towards bringing about a marriage between Warren and Marjorie before Robert can have time to snap up Marjorie. You know Warren's high-flown notions of 'chivalry' and 'honor,' and that species of fantasticality. Well, my idea is, that if Warren and Marjorie were placed in a compromising situation, and caught in it, Warren would be forced to offer Marjorie marriage forthwith."

"My goodness! What a row there would be! The Squire, with his temper, would half kill Mr. Warren!" she exclaimed.

"There again, you interrupt me with a reflection that is quite beside the mark," said Courthope. "We don't really care, do we, whether Robert half kills Warren or not, or kills Warren outright." He paused a little . . . "By the way, Robert mightn't find that so easy a job. Have you ever seen them fence together with foils?"

"Yes," she replied, somewhat breathlessly, "I've seen them jumping about and stabbing at each other on the vicarage lawn!"

"And which of the two got in the greater number of hits?"

"Mr. Warren did, I believe."

"He generally does. I have watched Robert come very near to apoplexy in some of their combats, and one of these times — take my word for it — in the midst of

## *The Troubling of the Waters*

the give-and-takes my cousin's fatty heart will give one fast, last pit-a-pat — *and stop!* Hannah, my pet, I am leading up to this: that Warren and Robert have made it a rule to have fencing-bouts, either at Edenhurst or at the vicarage, every Thursday afternoon for some time past — ever since Robert threw up his commission in the militia, in fact. Last Thursday afternoon, when Warren was expected at Edenhurst to fence, he didn't come, and didn't send any excuse. Now, that was odd for him, he's such a punctilious chap, so I wondered, and thought I'd stroll down to the church to see. But that was not a choir-practice afternoon, nor was he at the organ, nor at the vicarage. So I next went round to the Greyhound, as you may remember, and there learned that your sister, too, was not at home. Evidently, both Warren and Marjorie were missing. Very good! 'Heaven bless you, happy pair,' I thought to myself, till it was suggested inwardly to me by the excellent fiend who loves me better, Hannah, than all things, to take a stroll down Hewersfield Lane over the moor. I did so; and when I had reached the little covert beyond Ghyll Beck, and had Fennell's Tower in sight, what do you think I saw in the distance? Only two little human heads over the top of the battlements, and one of those heads had on a spread of felt hat such as were sported by the old Cavaliers whom Monsieur Meissonnier delighted to paint, and the other head had on a hat such as blooms like a poppy. And I breathed another prayer, and blessed them again."

"Oh, they meet at the tower?" whispered Hannah, in the awed accent of scandal.

"They meet there, or to be accurate, they have met at least once. Of course, I was a long way off, and can't be

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dead certain, but those two hats were doubtless the hats of Philip Warren and Marjorie Neyland, and of no one else. Now, if these people have met once there, it comes into my mind that they may meet there again. The real point is, Hannah, that the tower has, as is usual with towers, a door."

"Well?"

"And that door a lock, and in that lock an old key —"

"Yes!"

"And that key might be turned —"

"Oh, gracious!" whispered Hannah, "there comes somebody out of the shrubbery — it'll be all over Hudston that I was with you. I must run —"

"Yes, go. I'll come down to the Greyhound later."

He sprang back under cover of the firs, and commenced to whistle a little, and his sallow face wrinkled in a smile as he saw Hannah stoop, walk a few yards, and stoop again, pretending to search for something.

"Yes, my girl," he said to himself, "you are finding mischief, pecks of it, far more than you guess! At any rate, I have one willing assistant, and now to secure another! I have not seen Bennett for many days. This latest villainy should appeal to him, and it will have the added advantage of placing him further under my thumb. Yes, Bennett, limb of the law and of Satan, will come in useful here."

## CHAPTER II

### THE PERIL OF IT

THE Greyhound Hotel was a quite venerable pile, which had re-echoed to many an age of song and chucklings, balls and assemblies, and the baying of many a hound. Its halls were large, and its square bulk was not without a touch of quaintness and graceful architecture, because of the arcade with arches which ran along its south side. All the local grouse-shooters, and scenery-hunters, and seekers after moorland air, put up there, as a matter of course, for time and long-standing had made it a part of the county, like the moors, the trout, the game, and the gentry. There were drowsy times of the year, indeed, when the Greyhound only woke up after nightfall, in the one bar where local cronies sat to tipple snugly. But in "the season" old Jonas Neyland jingled with gold, sweated with prosperity, and "the business" went.

That most active period of the year was well over, and the brackens were turned brown that day when Marjorie Neyland first came back from London to fall like a stone hewn without hands into the flow of things at Hudston, troubling the waters. And now, a month later, on the evening when the Squire took his fate into his hands and came down to the Greyhound in his most chosen cravat,

### *Three Men and a Maid*

winds of winter were already wawling down the moor-gorges. The Squire was a man of sturdy build, somewhat puffed and over-red, fat in the lips, and bristly of mustache. He walked with that straddle of the legs which men get who are mostly a-horse-back.

He came to the Greyhound that evening, a better man than he had long been, a man vexed with the old ways, and meekly meaning to do better next time. When old Jonas Neyland came out bustling from his presence, to find and bring Marjorie to receive the bunch of orchids, Robert Courthope, left alone, paced the drawing-room grimly, collecting his rather scattered forces for the assault, gripping his fists together, trying to think out his line of argument.

But, as it happened, Marjorie was not in the house; and neither Jonas Neyland, nor his wife Martha, nor his sister-in-law, Aunt Margaret, could find Marjorie anywhere.

In fact, Marjorie had fled, having known from Hannah that the Squire would be coming. On the previous night Hannah had gone late into Marjorie's room, when the younger woman was before her mirror at her hair, making ready for bed, and Marjorie had said to Hannah, without glancing round: "My gracious! This indeed is a prodigal's return! But it is quite excellent, Hannah. You have come to sleep with me once more?"

"No," said Hannah, gruffly, "I've come to get some of my hair-curlers out of a drawer."

"Tell me, sister, in what way have I offended that you suddenly cease to sleep with me?" asked Marjorie, viewing herself from different angles in the glass.

"Offence!" snapped Hannah. "Why talk of that? It is just that I don't like a bed-fellow as a rule."

## *The Peril of It*

"But I am not a fellow, nor a rule, I am a maid and an exception — your own long-lost sister. Just think!"

Hannah's lips went a little whiter at this, pressing together with some venom, since she was not apt at countering sarcasm, and felt any show of wit as an affront. Marjorie's words, in fact, often had in her ears a certain dryness and suggestion of disdain. They sounded, as it were, out of a book, or out of the mouths of people in drawing-rooms, foreign and sour to Hannah's taste.

"There's nothing of that," she protested, seeking in drawers for the pretended hair-curlers: "I am accustomed to sleep across the passage, and I prefer it, if you don't mind."

"Then why did you sleep with me at first?" asked Marjorie.

"Oh, at first I thought you would be lonely in a place which had grown strange to you, and as a younger one you were to be indulged, so I —"

"Decided to keep me going with kicks throughout the night, is it so?"

"If I kicked you, I won't kick you any more," was the prompt retort. "So you have that much to be glad of at any rate."

"Yet I am not glad, Hannah," said Marjorie, with a glance over her shoulder, on whose snow her hair rolled in gold; "I want us to be ever such chums, you see, and a kiss in the morning will repay me for a night of kicks, dear, if you will. Will you? You must say 'yes.'"

"There's no 'must' about it," was Hannah's ungracious answer. "I am not one of those to be got over by soft words when I don't want to do a thing; you ought to know that by this time, Marjorie."

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"I begin to know," said her sister, bending aside to manage the mass of hair, and brush it here and there in long tresses, "but," she added, "nice people are more or less persuadable, aren't they, and responsive to the impulses of affection?"

"Oh, I'm not nice," answered Hannah, with a still stiffer lip and bending of brows. "I hate the word. I leave that to the likes of you, you see."

"You are quite nice in your way, too," mused Marjorie aloud, "when you don't choose to be nasty. And why should you ever choose the way of unkindness — especially to me, who am fond of you? For years I have been thinking of you, longing that aunt would let me come home, just to show myself off before people, and see you proud of the things I had learnt; not a great deal, goodness knows, but things not within the ken of Hudston. I forgot that you were a woman; I thought only of the sister. But I was, and am, so keen to be friendly; no woman was ever very fond of me, except aunt —"

"Well, the men make up for it, you see," put in Hannah, seizing the opening.

"Oh, the men? Yes, they are over-plentiful and gushing; but one can't live on honey. Bread is good, too, don't you know? I could afford to barter ten male hearts for one sister's, and am refused."

"Still, it is well to be you," said Hannah; "it must be a glory to be run after and flattered, even if it's a bit dangerous at times. People even say that the Squire is pretty gone on you."

"Mr. Courthope?"

"So they say."

"I am glad he likes me. I like him, too."

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"I hear he swears to marry you."

"Oh, he shouldn't swear — that's naughty."

"You mean to say that supposing — I only say supposing — the Squire was to ask you, you'd say 'no,' Marjorie?"

"I should tell you lots and lots of my secrets," answered Marjorie, with a wistful smile, "if you and I were real chums, as we ought to be. But as you choose the other way, I shall subject you to infernos of unsatisfied curiosity. Better bring your night-dress and sleep, while I extend the olive branch."

"Oh, I am not a child or a servant," cried Hannah, waxing wroth at Marjorie's self-possession. "You think a fair amount of yourself, don't you?"

"It is the awful red Squire who makes me vain. You would be vain, too, if the awful Squire swore to marry you."

"Oh, don't imagine that I am left quite out in the cold!" came the angry protest. "The Squire isn't the only man in the world. There are those who prefer a tall, dark girl to wax dolls, let me tell you."

"I agree with them," said Marjorie, "I, too, prefer a tall, dark girl to a wax doll, like poor me; but the tall, dark girl must be a lady."

"An innkeeper's daughter can't be a real lady, so it is useless her trying. She only makes people laugh at her when she sticks it on, you see."

"I don't believe that in the least," answered Marjorie. "I believe that no one laughs if they see her endeavoring to be gentle, and gracious, and refined. And if they did laugh, it would not matter. You just have a try, Hannah, and who knows whether the red Squire may not yet leave



### *Three Men and a Maid*

me desolate in order to fly to your tall, dark arms. At present, you know, he wouldn't dream of such a thing."

"Oh, you do fancy yourself, don't you?" hissed Hannah, grinning rancidly, "my goodness, you do, you do! Not that I am out of the running, either! Not a bit of it! There are others as good as the Squire, every bit, and, as far as prospects go, far better than that idle Philip Warren —"

"I should leave poor Mr. Warren's name alone, if I were you. He is a gentleman of rather high distinction," said Marjorie, quietly. Then she added: "Let me see, who about Hudston is 'as good as the Squire, every bit'? There is Mr. James Courthope —"

"Well, and what of Mr. James?" came the tart response.

"Ah, I thought there was something in that quarter. A girl should know how to control her blushes, Hannah, and not be a mere rose. I can quite well see you in the glass, you know. Assuming I am not mistaken, is James Courthope quite the right sort?"

"What do you mean?"

Hannah was bitterly aggressive now, — ready to create a scene.

"Nothing specially; don't fly into a rage. I don't think I like the man, that is all. On the whole, I much prefer my raging, tearing Squire."

"No doubt — as the fox said that the grapes were sour! Mr. James is a hundred times handsomer than the Squire, as for that; anyway, he isn't drinking himself to death —"

"No, but he is less sincere, less honest and loyal. The Squire *is* a gentleman."

## *The Peril of It*

"What are you talking about? What can you possibly know against Mr. James Courthope?"

"Nothing much, but I don't want you to have any foolish fancies about the man, for that can only lead to trouble for you. He isn't fond of you — at least, he isn't quite honest; he isn't — true to you, if he has told you anything."

"You had better mind what you are saying!" cried Hannah, quite white with anger. How dare you! How do you know whether he is fond of me or not, and whether he is true or not? Who is he fond of, then? You? They are all fond of you, is that it? Look here, my girl, you had better have a care how you go! I can stand a lot, but I can't stand that."

"Go to bed, Hannah," said Marjorie, "and let me recommend you not to omit your prayers."

"Not that a few prayers would hurt you, either!" retorted Hannah, "for you need them, setting your cap at all the men in the place. So it's you that Mr. James is fond of, not me? Oh, no! He must have had some encouragement, I should think! But a girl should be a bit modest, and should know how to keep herself to herself, I do think, and not make herself the talk of the country-side, trying to draw every man that she sees after her. And as for Mr. James, I shouldn't trouble my little head, if I were you, for you don't know what he thinks of you. They all look upon you as a dressed-up doll, trying to be a lady, Mr. Warren just like the rest, but we can't see ourselves as others see us. So I shouldn't trouble my head about Mr. James Courthope, if I were you, and I shouldn't trouble it about Mr. Warren either, for Mr. Isambard would just turn Mr. Warren neck and crop out of the vicarage if he heard a whisper of such a thing, and

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the poor young man hasn't as many pence in his pocket as father has pounds, with all his pride. Besides, the Squire has fixed his eye on you, as he might on a two-year-old that he took a fancy to for a time. And it's no good your putting on any of your airs with *him*. He's coming here to-morrow certain, and you'll have to give up your own private little fancies, you see, and buckle under to what you are told to do, for — ”

“That's done!” said Marjorie, brightly, giving a final pat to her hair. “Now, Hannah — go.” She pointed towards the door.

“Very pleased, I'm sure,” though Hannah looked rather cowed than pleased.

Turning at the door, she added:

“If you don't want to meet the Squire, the only way will be to slip out and hide somewhere. The vicarage shrubbery is the nearest place. *I* shouldn't betray you, for all I've said.” And she was gone.

Marjorie wondered a little at this parting advice, but made up her mind to act upon it, knowing that there was trouble ahead with the Squire, to say “no” to whom might prove no light matter. What she in no way suspected was that Hannah had thus advised her because of James Courthope's prompting, for it was Courthope's policy to keep Marjorie and the Squire well apart at that crisis in affairs.

And so it came about that when the Squire presented himself at the Greyhound the next afternoon, Marjorie was in the thickest part of the vicarage shrubbery, which adjoined the boundary fence of the Greyhound paddock, and of the good folk in the hotel only Hannah, who was quiet as a mouse, knew where Marjorie was.

## *The Peril of It*

Robert Courthope meanwhile paced and waited, a sight to see, the red of his face mottled with white — his mood one minute all fret and impatience, and the next half glad of the delay, that he might think how to put his case in the best words. For so young and masterful a man, his agitation was strangely patent. He could not be still a moment. When he put up his finger to pass it down his strip of side whisker, it danced like the finger of one who marbles paint. He had the name of "a lady's man," this red Squire; but in truth, he was only a woman's man, and he now paid Marjorie the compliment of being nervous.

Moreover, here he stood at the parting of the ways, at a juncture serious to him as life and death, meaning the decision of all his future. Rightly or wrongly, he had taken it into his head that Marjorie would prove a match for "the drink," and had she known the secret of all the good that was then groping and hoping upward in his soul, compassion might have kept her from flying from him.

When the thought struck him that the innkeeper was long, and he asked himself why the old fool did not come back, he kicked a chair, or dashed a book to the floor; but if he fancied that he heard a footstep he nervously cleared his throat, casting a glance into the mirror at his button-hole orchid, and well-groomed get-up. And the dusk deepened in the drawing-room.

Marjorie's father, meantime, was as reluctant to show his nose to the Squire as to face a lion. In a state of utmost, if comical, dismay, he was every minute casting up his arms and eyes together, flinging off into a score of starts to run to tell the Squire that Marjorie was out, but

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halting in the hope that she would yet be found, since several waiters, stable-men, and maids were out seeking her.

"Where can she be?" he asked many times. "Her place is at home, not wandering about. This comes of being too much of the fine lady."

"Don't talk nonsense, Jonas," was the reproof of Aunt Margaret, sitting primly in her oaken chair. "You always hit the wrong nail on the head. If the girl wasn't a fine lady, would the Squire wish to see her at all? Did ye ever know him come hankering after Hannah in this fashion? Fine ladies are made so; it's their nature to *be* fine, and they can't avoid it; and some lasses will follow the mother's side, and some will follow the father's side."

"Tut, tut," said Neyland, prickly with haste and anxiety, "I've heard all that before, and I don't know as it ever mended any broken bones —"

"Oh, Jonas, don't take on so wi' Margaret," put in Martha, his wife.

"Why, what is it now?" cried he. "What am I saying? You must be remarkably touchy!"

"Well, I *be* touchy in some things," murmured Martha, half to herself, for Marjorie was the pride of her heart.

"I *ham* touchy, not I 'be' touchy," said Aunt Margaret quietly, addressing her correction to the parish-poor mitts which she was knitting.

"Look here, where's the good of wrangling?" asked the innkeeper, at the end of his patience. "There's the Squire yonder waiting — p'raps smashed some of the furniture by this time, and who could blame him? If I could say to him the girl's here, or the girl's there, but to say she's gone out, no one knows where to —"

## *The Peril of It*

"Well, it's a gentleman's place to wait on a lady," said the essentially downright voice of Aunt Margaret. "He only thinks the more of her for it, and likes her all the better when he does see her."

"Look here, Meg, I am sorry to hear you talking that style," cried Jonas, angrily, "seeing that Squire Courthope is waitin' for our lass, who is only a tradesman's daughter, when all is said and done. If you don't bring that same lass to some mischief yet, it'll be no fault of yours. She ought never to have been sent away to London, if you ask me, and if she was, she ought to have been kept where she was to finish what she began. As it is —"

"Well, what's the use of quarreling?" demanded his wife. "That won't help to find her. She's no more a prisoner than anybody else, and if you'd gone to look for her yourself, you'd have found her by now, Jonas; but you generally trust to other folk what you should see to with your own eye."

"*I* do?" cried the injured Jonas, wrathfully. "I must say you are remarkably funny!"

"Well, perhaps I *be* funny!" repeated Martha, and again, like the repetition of a mechanism, came from the oaken chair the murmur: "*ham* funny, not *be* funny."

Jonas cast up his arms, and tramped about, a much-pestered man. But neither gestures of despair nor talk in a circle would bring Marjorie.

From a room to the left came a tinkling of a piano, where Hannah was striving to teach herself some smattering of music, and in a room to the right the Squire smacked his leg with his hunting-crop, or paused to stare at the woodcuts of old prize-fights and Derby winners on the walls, and presently whistled viciously through his teeth. And

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all the time Marjorie was reading "Maud" in the leafy solitude of the vicarage shrubbery.

She had been there perhaps half an hour, and was beginning to think of returning to the hotel, when she was startled by the parting of the bushes near, and a soft-witted youth named Felix appeared before her. What other name than "Felix" was his, perhaps not ten people knew, for every one called him simply "Felix." He was an idiot, a lank creature, all bent to one side, his knees knocked together, with tumble-down shoulders, and an open mouth. As soon as his eyes found out Marjorie in the bushes, his thick tongue greeted her with the words, "By gum, I was lookin' for thee."

"For me?"

"Aye, I heard as you might be here."

"But — no one knows that I am here. Who told you?" she asked in great surprise.

"A' dunnot know who told me. I know his feäce, but he doän't belong here. He said I might find you somewhere hereabouts, and I was to say as Mr. Warren wanted te knoä if you will be going te Fennell's Tower this evening about six."

Marjorie flushed, turned pale, and laughed almost at the same moment. Of all queer things, here was the queerest, that Philip Warren should send her such a message by word-of-mouth, unless the knowledge of some unknown person that she was to be found in the shrubbery was queerer still.

"I really don't understand," she said. "Tell me again."

Felix repeated his jumbled tale, the substance of which undoubtedly was that Mr. Warren very much wanted to know if the lady would be going to the tower that evening.

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"What was the man like from whom you heard Mr. Warren's message?" asked Marjorie.

"A little, short gentleman —"

"A gentleman — not a villager?"

"Noä, a little, short gentleman, wiv' a watch-chain an' a black hat, and —" there Felix's powers of description faltered.

Marjorie put a dubious finger on her lips. By this time she was acquainted with most people in the neighborhood, but none of the local squire-archy was specially "little and short" — unless it were little Mr. Bennett, of Carruthers & Bennett, solicitors, of Wentworth. Yet it would hardly be he. Philip Warren would never entrust such a man with a communication of that sort. She assumed, however, that the mystery, odd as it looked, must have some simple explanation, and, curious to hear it, not suspecting any evil, she said to Felix with something of a blush: "It happens that I *was* thinking of taking a walk toward the tower this evening, and I have no especial objection to Mr. Philip Warren knowing of it, But — who is to tell him?"

"A'll tell 'im, if you like," said Felix.

"Well, if *you* like," she answered. "Here are some coppers for you, but mind you don't —"

"Doän't what?"

"Don't tell any one else, you see? And you would only tell Mr. Warren himself, if you found him alone, wouldn't you? You have lots and lots of sense, I know, and here are two more pennies for you." She had stood up, and spoke breathlessly, her unconscious heart perhaps pre-saging some of the wrong and evil in store for her. "Now, Felix, tell me what you are to do?"



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"A'm te tell Mr. Warren," said Felix, "but noäbody else, seein' as it's noäbody else's affair."

"Oh, you have wit enough! I always thought so," laughed Marjorie; "so now — go, and be lucky!" whereat Felix turned slowly, and ambled away with his forward-stumbling, rickety-rackety gait.

From the shrubbery a steep path led up through grass-land toward the vicarage, a group of beeches at its top; and out from the beeches, as Felix drew near, stepped that same "little, short gentleman," whom Felix had attempted to describe, so that Felix, if he ever felt surprise, must have felt it now at this second apparition of one whom he had supposed to have walked away into the vague world. The unknown was a small, smartly dressed person, with a straight neck, clean-shaven, loose-mouthed, who five yards off looked like a lad, and a yard off looked like an old man. He really was the Nutworth solicitor, who for a moment had been suggested to Marjorie's mind by Felix's description of him — and he was not the tool and the slave of James Courthope without reason.

"Seen her, boy?" he whispered, stepping forward.

"Aye," said Felix.

"And will she be going to the tower?" asked Bennett, eagerly.

"She says," answered the idiot, "that her goin' is to be all a secret atween her, me, and Mr. Warren; so I dursn't tell thee."

"Good! Now, the next thing for you to do is to go to Mr. Warren. Just say to him, 'I'm come to you with a message from Miss Marjorie Neyland, who asks me to tell you that she will be at Fennell's Tower this evening at six o'clock.' Repeat those words to me."

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Felix, with a head completely muddled as to what was what and who was who in this matter, attempted the repetition, broke down in the midst, and was twice more put through it.

"But you mustn't say that you saw me, you know," said Bennett; "just say, if Mr. Warren asks you anything, that Miss Neyland told you to go to him with that message. And now, let me point out to you exactly where you will find Mr. Warren — in the summer-house at the bottom of the vicarage Old Garden. You cross the park, go past the conservatory through an arch, turn to your left, and you come to the garden."

He went some way with Felix, pointing and repeating, then turned on his heels, and made haste to disappear.

Felix knew the vicarage grounds quite well, so was not long in coming to the summer-house, in which he found Philip Warren gazing far away, with his finger between the leaves of a black-letter treatise on "*Mediæval Chasubles*," and Philip, still half in his dream of old ages, stared quite a minute at Felix before realizing who and what was before him.

"What, Felix, that you?" he asked suddenly.

Felix, without preface, unburthened his brain of its last-heard words, while on Philip Warren's brow appeared wrinkles of the incredulity which had lately perplexed Marjorie.

"Do I understand you properly?" he asked. "Do you say that Miss Neyland asked you to tell me that she will be going to Fennell's Tower this evening at six?"

"Aye, she give me them," said Felix, showing Marjorie's coppers in his hand.

"Strange!" murmured Philip: "She must have some-

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thing to tell me, or may want to see the seals and roll-of-arms — but stop! it is already almost six.” He glanced at his watch — “Here’s another sixpence for you,” he cried, and was gone, running.

It was indeed evening, and a wind which had arisen was bleakly sweeping the moorland. Marjorie, by this time, was on her way to the tower, and at about that same moment when Philip Warren broke into a run, the Squire in the Greyhound drawing-room suddenly lost all patience, stamped, shouted, hammered the table with his hunting-crop, and snapped the bell-rope in a passion.

## CHAPTER III

### A NIGHT OF EVIL

PHILIP WARREN took a pride in a high condition of physical fitness. Hence, he could run, and was already waiting on the outer steps of Fennell's Tower when Marjorie paced up the foot-path through the gorse surrounding it.

He sprang to meet her, saying, as he took her hand, "It was good of you to send me the message, and I need not perhaps say that I was delighted to come."

"You always look happy," replied Marjorie, all flushed and laughing, "so that one has no means of knowing when you are delighted."

"I don't always look happy to every one," said Warren, "but I do to you, because at the times when you happen to see me, I see you; and then, of course, I am delighted."

"Wonderfully said, and like a cavalier!" cried Marjorie, with the frank air of comradeship which existed between the two. "I only wish I might be omnipresent, and thus keep you ever smiling. But it is rather late — I can't stay long; tell me why you specially wished to see me this evening."

Philip stood a moment silent; then parried a question which was incomprehensible by saying:

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"I — specially wish to see you every evening."

"Do you think my complexion unfit for the morning glare? Nevertheless, you don't send me special messengers every evening."

"Except the envoys of my thoughts and wishes."

"But this evening you sent Felix instead?"

"I think not. Felix came to me from you —"

"Did you send me no message by any one?"

"No. Since you ask me so plainly, I must answer 'No.'"

"Then, what in Heaven's name did you think of me when Felix took my message to you?"

"I thought that you were very gracious to me, and might perhaps wish to see at once the seals and roll-of arms; so I have brought them."

"Yes, yes. Yet how bewildering is this thing! What *could* you have thought of me really? Listen — I was sitting just now in the vicarage shrubbery, when Felix came upon me — how he knew I was there I can't dream —"

"My dear Marjorie, don't distress yourself," broke in Philip. "Take it quite calmly; it is of no importance. The vital point is that you are here."

"Please hear me — it is so excruciating that you should think — listen: Felix suddenly appeared from nowhere, and told me that some 'short little gentleman' — so he said — had a message from you to me, and that you wished to know whether I should be taking a stroll to the tower this evening —"

"Ha! ha!" laughed Warren, "my good angel has been at work for me, though he assumed a prosaic form."

"But how *outré* a thing! How can you laugh? At the

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time I thought it almost impossible that you should send such a message by — word of mouth. I ought to have followed my first instincts. Yet, afterwards, I said to myself, 'There must be some explanation,' and I mentioned to Felix that I might — perhaps — be sauntering this way — ”

“Excellent! And gave Felix some coppers, for he showed them to me! This is the first time in my life that I ever got anything without working for it!” Philip was overjoyed, and paid slight heed to the curious circumstances which led up to their meeting.

“You take it all as a matter of course,” said Marjorie. “How, then, do you explain it?”

“I don’t explain, I simply accept my luck as birds accept the spring. I suppose that there is some absurd mistake. We must think it out afterwards; for the present — ”

“For the present, the thing is for me to think of going back.”

“Then most of the Providence lavished upon me will be sacrificed. You know that you wished to see the seals, and I have come crammed with lore for your special benefit.”

“Well — but still, I shouldn’t stay long.”

They moved into the tower, one of those old stone watch-dogs of the north, built of untooled ashlar. The one door, placed some distance above the ground, was approached by a flight of rough steps; inside, it was dark, the only windows being narrow slits placed high up, so that Philip guided Marjorie by holding her hand as they climbed to a first floor made of slightly arched stone, and thence to the top, where the evening gloaming seemed on

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a sudden quite light to them after the interior gloom out of which they had emerged. Philip carried with him from the loft some strips of tarpaulin. So, on the battlemented roof, fifty feet from the ground, Marjorie sat in the same embrasure where she had more than once sat before, and Philip, seated in the embrasure next to it, produced the armorial insignia of his family, his interest in which, as in all old things, was so lively and fresh that he had infected Marjorie, too, with a like interest. The stone coping served as a table, and from the first moment their talk was strictly confined to the business in hand. The last rays of the sun saw their heads bent together over the antiquities. Philip doffed his spread of felt hat, and his forehead was momentarily caressed by the long sweep of an ostrich feather, which, rolling over Marjorie's hat, was flustered by the breeze.

"You know rolls-of-arms, of course," Philip was soon saying — "long narrow slips of parchment on which are written lists of the names and titles of certain people; with description of their insignia. Well, these — and seals — are the earliest authorities existing of English heraldry. Seals came into use about the eleventh century, while the earliest roll-of-arms is of the time of Henry III —"

"Quite so," said Marjorie, with a flying glance behind her shoulder. "But, as the hour is late, I want you to come at once to your own seals, since I really mustn't stay. Do excuse me, but I feel a foolish sort of nervousness this evening. Ah! — what is that?" She started sharply.

"What did you hear?" he asked.

"I thought I heard a sound like something falling."

"There is nothing in the tower, as we know. Perhaps we have disturbed some grouse in the heather."

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"Well, go on," she said, with a constrained laugh.

"We have been here much later than this," he assured her. "It isn't dark. There is no reason to be nervous. But, as I was saying — Where was I? Well, let us come to the De Warrennes at once. You know, of course, that devices on shields were earlier than armorial bearings, but it has frequently happened that the shield device has been copied into the later armorial achievement, and this is just what took place in the case of the De Warrennes. Well, now — the earliest seal of my house is that of John de Warrenne, who fell in the year 1214, during the invasion of France at the battle of Bouvines. Here is the copy of it — a small specimen, you see, displaying, rather crudely engraved, the head of a dragon. It was first appended to a deed dating about 1199, and is interesting, as it showed the source of the hereditary bearings of my family — I am sorry —"

"No, it was my fault," protested Marjorie, whose hat-rim had suddenly excluded the seal from view. "I seem unable to sit quite still just now, I don't know why. . . . How many seals were there in all?"

"Only four. I am coming in a moment to that of William de Warrenne. But, talking of John's dragon, I must explain that, in heraldry, the dragon is next in importance to the griffin, which is a compound of the lion and eagle. The dragon appears to have had its origin in the stories brought by travelers, who, on their way to the Holy Land, may have seen the crocodile on the banks of the Nile —"

"Now listen!" whispered Marjorie with a fresh start.

"I don't seem to interest you to-night — listen to what?" asked Philip.



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"I thought I heard a little steady sound somewhere. Only my fancy! You have vouched for it, you know, that the tower is not haunted."

"Except when you are on it."

"What, am I a ghost?"

"No, an angel."

"Hark!—"

"The herald angel sings!" murmured Philip.

"My fancy again. . . . No, it is you who are the herald angel. Go on with your heraldry."

"Let me see, where was I?"

"Crocodiles on the banks of the Rhine. . . ."

"Of the—? Ha, ha! yes, of the Nile—quite so. Well, in the roll-of-arms—time of Henry III—our arms of gules with a chevron between three dragon-heads are described in the quaint old Norman-French as being borne by Humphrey de Warrenne at Evesham, where he was one of Simon de Monfort's little army, and died fighting by the side of the Earl. And now we come to the second seal extant, namely, that of William de Warrenne, which has been found attached to a deed about the year 1295. This displays the shield of the house as before, and here it is. I daresay you must have heard that this warrior fell at the battle of Falkirk in the reign of Edward I?"

"Which warrior?" asked Marjorie, glancing away again over her shoulder.

"Why, William de Warrenne."

"Oh, please do forgive me. I don't know why I am so distraught. Yes, of course, he was the one who fell at Falkirk."

"The third seal," said Philip, "is a fine one, richly

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tracried, and contains the armorial device. It dates from about 1350, and belonged to Robert de Warrenne, who fell at the battle of Poitiers, where the French were routed by the Black Prince — ”

“Did Robert fall, too?” interrupted Marjorie. “What an unfortunate lot! They all seem to have got killed.”

“Certainly, we have not been happy,” said Philip musingly. “Our blood has been poured forth in every land. The fourth seal, however, brought us some luck, and has ever since been the mascot of our race. It is that of Philip de Warrenne, who fought with great bravery at Agincourt, where he was wounded by one of the French archers, but not fatally, for he was saved by his shield, which bore the same device as before, but here the shield is placed couchée, and over it, on a helm, appears for the first time the crest, and the motto — ‘*Courage sans peur.*’ Here you have it complete in my ring. For centuries now it has been the Warren talisman and pledge of good chance in this world.”

Philip lifted his hand, and Marjorie, not for the first time, bent over the ring in the fast-fading twilight.

“But why do you wear it on the second finger, and on the right hand, too?” she asked.

“An old habit of the family,” he answered. “I have never been able to discover the origin of it.”

“Do you always wear it?”

“Oh, always, ever since I left Oxford. As you see, the finger has become much too big for the ring, which has accordingly imbedded itself, so that the only way in which it can leave me now is by an amputation — ”

“Unless the gold on the fastenings of the stone were to snap some day,” said Marjorie.

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"No, I think it will outlast the finger," said Philip, smiling. "If I were really to lose it — ah, on that day I should feel that my good angel had truly abandoned me."

"Not really?"

"Yes, really. You deem that statement rather fanciful, no doubt. Suppose I tell you that such a thing is historically ascertained to have happened in the case of at least three scions of our house?"

"Oh, such things may be, I am not a scoffer," said Marjorie. "And now — really — I must go. The night is turning quite bleak and windy — perhaps there is going to be a storm." She stood up, holding her face to the rough caresses of the moorland breeze.

"Well, I think now," said Philip, standing up after her, "that you could pass an examination on the Warren seals?"

"I'm afraid not yet," she answered, "for I have only been able to listen with one ear. I am sure you will go through it again some other day, when my mind is more receptive. I can't get over the oddity of the fact that I am here at all. Some one must have had some motive. Well, I can only inquire and set my wits to work —"

"Ah, then the mystery will be made most clear," said he. "I should not care, if ever I committed a secret wrong to have you on my track!"

"You make me both an angel and a detective in one evening —"

"I mean both!"

"Do you? You never say anything that you don't mean, I know, so I feel duly elated. But come."

He handed her down through the trap-door in the slightly

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arched roof of stone, and passed after her at the very moment when, perhaps half a mile away in the moorland-gorge called Ghyll Beck, at a spot where a continual splash of water washing over an old mill-wheel broke the silence of the moor, Marjorie's sister, Hannah, met James Courthope, with the awful whisper, "Is it all right?"

"Safe — safe — they are prisoners," panted Courthope.

"Oh, good Lord, how pale and out of breath you are!" breathed Hannah.

"Yes, by gad, the vile key," gasped Courthope. "Couldn't get it to turn — couldn't get it to turn! — I pulled it out — dropped it — nearly spoiled everything!"

"But you did at last —?"

"Yes, the rotten key — it nearly broke my hands. I don't know how they didn't hear me striving. I couldn't get it to turn — it wouldn't *turn* —!"

"Never mind — never mind — it's over now."

"Yes, confound the key! Yesterday it turned quite easily. This evening, before they came, it turned, but when I wanted to lock them in, I couldn't get it to work — it stuck — damn it!"

"But it turned after! It's all right — do calm yourself, James."

"I tell you it hurt me, girl. The very devil seemed to be struggling against me. But at last I got it turned — at last."

"Were you in the tower when they arrived?"

"Yes, hidden in the dark among the sacks which old Stuart keeps there. They came in — and went up. They were hardly up the first ladder when I was at the door. I meant to have it locked before they could reach the top, and then the beastly lock stuck. If they had glanced

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down the face of the wall, they couldn't have avoided seeing me, for the vile thing wouldn't turn. I tried to take it out to see what was the matter — and the key wouldn't come. At last it came with a clatter — something knocked it out of my hand. It made a noise —”

“I wouldn't make such a fuss about a thing that is done with,” said Hannah sourly.

“Well, here I am. I crept away like a rabbit among the whins. It's all over now; they're prisoners till morning.”

“If Mr. Warren shouts, perhaps they can hear him from the mill-house?”

“No fear, I've tried it myself — our pair of love-birds are safe for the night. No one will pass this way. Tomorrow it will be all over Hudston that they spent the night together in the tower. Gad! Won't people smile! Our romantic Philip is bound to marry her in a hurry. Where's Robert now?”

“I left him at the Greyhound,” answered Hannah. “When father told him that Marjorie was out he cursed, and said he would wait there all night till she came, so things are in a nice stew at home. . . . Perhaps, by this time, those two have found out that the door is locked!”

“Very likely; they'll think it's the wind, or the devil!”

“My, I should just like to hear what Marjorie says! What a thing! She'll be glad in her heart, I know — she'll be half dead with fright, but she'll be glad underneath in her heart. It's Mr. Warren that I feel sorry for.”

Courthope wiped his wet brow, and now, having recovered his breath, smiled with something of his cold self-control, saying:

“Well, we have nothing to keep us here. I must get

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back in a hurry to the Hall. I came out secretly; the servants must think that I was in all the while. Now, Hannah, no weakness of face at home, remember, no strange looks, no trembling of lips or mysterious smiles. Better not see Robert to-night, but persuade your father to send him home. Good night — I feel rather done up — meet me in the morning as arranged.”

“Is that all, James?” murmured the woman.

“Eh? Sorry. I’m rather upset, you see.” Then he gave her the forgotten kiss, off-handedly, as one throws a bone to a dog.

Hannah walked homewards with such a furnace of excitement raging in her bosom, that James Courthope might as well have forbidden the sky to be blue, as counsel her to keep her usual face that night. Agitation at the event in itself, a fore-feeling of the wide eyes and hushed breath of all Hudston to-morrow, her wonder how Marjorie was taking it, how Warren, what “father” would say, what Mr. Isambard and the Squire, — all these thoughts surged in a chaos through her brain.

But what most of all occupied her troubled conscience was the fanciful notion that Marjorie would be “glad in her heart,” and this made her bitter. Marjorie would be marrying a “gentleman like Mr. Warren,” now, and, amid all her tears of dismay, was secretly rejoicing at being pent up in the tower with him, and it was Hannah who had helped to bring that satisfaction to Marjorie. This made Hannah hiss. It was all very well for James Courthope to go straight to his ends, and be pleased at the success of his plans, but Hannah had a feminine point of view, and a feminine spite, and she felt more of envy at Marjorie a prisoner there all a night long with

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her love, locked up, and "glad of it" than she felt satisfaction at the trouble thereby brought upon Marjorie.

And it was this sick nerve of Hannah at Marjorie's strange way of wooing fortune that wonderfully threw Courthope's scheme out of gear, and complicated everything.

Courthope's wish, which he had impressed upon Hannah, was that not a soul should dream where Marjorie was till the morning, when, after her escapade, some farmer or gamekeeper, passing the tower after daybreak, might set free the pair of prisoners; but when Hannah came back to the hotel, instead of keeping herself quiet, she could not restrain her fevered feet from hovering about the door of the room in which Robert Courthope waited in vain for Marjorie to come.

She longed to drop a hint to the Squire that Marjorie was with Mr. Warren in Fennell's Tower; for, anyway, she thought, Marjorie was already disgraced, James's aims were therefore already secured, and it did not matter whether the two remained together until the morning or only until after ten o'clock that night.

When she reached the hotel, after parting from James Courthope, lights had long since been lit. The Squire still paced the drawing-room; and here, slight as it may seem, was the dangerous fact in the situation. The angry man all this time would eat nothing, nor would he even drink, though Jonas Neyland had several times implored him to dine, and await Marjorie's home-coming at his ease. The Squire was in ill mood, therefore. At that hour of the day, usually, he was rosy with food, well warmed with wine; to-night he paced there stubbornly, with a perilous patience, refusing meanwhile to be com-

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forted, with misery hanging on his cheek. Now, hunger in certain temperaments produces a madness which is classed as a disease in books on pathology; and "hunger madness," explosive in itself, will, when accompanied by drink craving, go off like a gun.

After a long time — it might be hours — when the night was old, and Hudston folk mainly in bed, Hannah, unable any more to bear the burden of her secret, fluttered into the drawing-room, and, apologizing to Squire Courthope for the intrusion, began to look about the room as if seeking something. Courthope choked back his fury at sight of her.

"Well, Hannah," said he, in the voice of a saint, "what has become of your sister?"

Hannah, pallid as an apparition, smiled.

"There's no telling, sir, I am sure. She's nowhere in the village, that's pretty certain, and there's only one thing for anybody to think —"

"And what is that?"

"No doubt she's out on the moor."

"The moor! At this time of night?"

"I don't mean in the open, sir."

"Well, where *do* you mean?"

"There's Fennell's Tower —"

"Absurd; what are you thinking of, Hannah?"

"She *has* been there several times of an evening, I know, though never so late as this."

"Fennell's Tower," muttered the Squire. "What on earth would she go to the tower for?"

Hannah peered deeply into a flower-vase, looking palely for something. But she smiled again, saying, "She wouldn't be there alone, you know."



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Robert Courthope made no answer. He resumed his pacing, his hands behind his back, with the hunting-crop in them, and for a minute or two the clock ticked in silence, while Hannah continued to pry earnestly into each dim corner of the room. Then he broke the stillness, asking, with a forced calmness that quivered his lip:

"Whom would she go to the tower with, eh?"

"Oh, Mr. Courthope," said Hannah, "it wouldn't do to tell tales out of school!"

"No," said the man, "true enough, so very true, when you come to think of it. Yet you will tell me, eh?"

The Squire asked it with a wheedling grin, his face near to Hannah's. And she, white and smiling, her eyes cast down to her hands, answered:

"Why, anybody might tell you, for it's the talk of the village, seeing that she is always with Mr. Warren."

At this, Robert Courthope walked away from her, with his head bent; then suddenly turning, he put his clenched hands on the table, staring at Hannah with a flaming face and trembling frame. No word was spoken; only, while the clock ticked many times, the man glared at the ghost which he saw, and the woman, too, stared, stricken dumb by the sight of his mute rage.

All at once, Hannah found herself alone. Robert Courthope was gone pelting down the stairs — through the village street — down Hewersfield Lane to the moor. He was of a build too prone to portliness to run very far. When he was compelled to stop and walk, he felt wronged by his lack of wind, and when the rising gale, which was blowing straight in his face, impeded him, he felt wronged by heaven as well as earth. Let it be understood that the first lesson which he had learned on leaving his cradle was

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that Hudston was his by divine right — the land, the houses, the people — all that Hudston held within its bounds — and that Marjorie meant life to him now.

When he reached the foot-path through the thicket surrounding the tower, he advanced as cunningly as one stalking game. On coming within a yard of the little clearing near the entrance to the tower, he crouched low on his knees to watch. The moon was moving wildly in and out among flying masses of cloud, lighting them here and there to the whiteness of lunatic countenances, so Robert Courthope could see the two prisoners. Little he dreamed that they were there not of their own free will, and, indeed, he might well be forgiven his unhappy error at that moment.

They were standing on the roof, and the battlemented coping hid them no higher than Marjorie's waist. The clean, high-headed profile of Philip, bending over Marjorie, looked almost elfin in the moonshine, while Marjorie's arms cast about Philip's neck had, in the maddened eyes of the man beneath, a certain wildness of abandonment. He could see, but because he could not see nearly and clearly, the scene up there on the tower-top was touched for him with something of strangeness and glamor, which poisoned his jealousy with a drop of more mortal gall. That same redness and shaking of the face with which he had lately glared at Hannah in the hotel overcame him now, and he glared at them in their heaven, until finally there gushed from his throat one loud, long bellow of uncouth laughter, which the storm and the moor flung far in echoes down the valley; and even as he yielded to this sudden mania he was gone, rushing back the way he had come.

Such a laugh was that, so startling to the lovers on the

### *Three Men and a Maid*

tower, that some seconds elapsed before they could collect themselves sufficiently to be glad of some one near to set them free. And some seconds more passed before Philip began to hail the laughter with all the power of his lungs. But Courthope was gone like a madman, crashing his way through the tangled gorse, quite heedless of the path, and still not knowing that the others were imprisoned.

Philip's shouts reached his ears as sounds which had no concern for him; and Philip, receiving no answer, said to Marjorie in the greatest surprise:

"He doesn't seem to answer . . . ! Didn't it sound to you like Robert Courthope's laugh?"

"I am certain that it was his," answered Marjorie, clinging to him in a new fear. And thus was another strand spun in the poisonous spider's web of circumstance which environed them.

Courthope, meantime, was hurrying back to the village to get his horse, flying from that moonlit scene on the tower as from the plague, in the mood of a man who finds that the house of life has collapsed about his head, too dazed to do aught but follow the instinct which prompts the undone to fly.

He was hurrying, therefore, with the intention of mounting his horse, of racing to the Hall, and there, perhaps assuaging a dreadful thirst which possessed him before his dazed brain should be able to resume its work of thought. But in Hewersfield Lane he was stopped, for, at a corner of the road, black under tree-shadow, he ran full tilt into the arms of the Hon. and Rev. Oliver Isambard, vicar and rural dean, Philip Warren's uncle, who was then returning to the vicarage from the sick-bed of his curate.

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The impact between them had again the effect of bringing from the Squire's dry mouth a loud guffaw, upon which the clergyman, whose ear detected something deranged in the laugh, said:

"What is wrong, Courthope, and why do you add enjoyment to injury?"

"Oh, is it you, Isambard?" cried Courthope, quickly alive to the retribution which should overtake Philip Warren.

"It is the part of me which you have left. Whither away at so furious a rate?"

"Ha, ha! I have just left the moor. I say, where's your nephew to-night, Isambard?"

"I hope that by this time he is at home," answered the vicar. "He was not there when I quitted the house an hour ago."

Then Robert Courthope caught the vicar by the shoulder, brought his mouth close to the vicar's ear, and did a dastardly thing, a thing which, in his proper senses, he would have been far too good a fellow to do.

"He's on top of Fennell's Tower — with a girl," he hissed. "You go soft. . . . You'll see for yourself."

And he was gone again, in a frenzied run.

The vicar and rural dean of Hudston took thought for a moment while he listened to the retreating footsteps. Then he went on his way to the bottom of the lane, but there, instead of turning to the right toward the vicarage, turned to the left toward the moor. He would have regarded Courthope's whisper as the raving of a madman, but for Philip's strange absence from home all that evening. Even as it was, he little believed; but he went to see, "went soft" as the Squire had bid him, and saw and came away "soft."

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Then he went home, took off his overcoat, and sat up with a trimmed lamp, waiting for Philip to come.

He was a man of under middle height and of middle age, broad in the shoulders, with a square brow, and eyes like two blue slits peering through a mask. His face was dry, pale, and seemed hewn out of rock. His lips pursed together like a clip. All over the vicar was written the word "Character," and of such human granite is fashioned neither Hope nor Charity, no matter what the Faith to which it is molded.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE UPSHOT

It happened that there was at least one other sick man beside the curate in Hudston that night, and through him Philip and Marjorie were delivered from their prison not long after midnight. By one of his fitful shouts Philip caught the ear of a boy far off who was crossing the moor into the village to summon Dr. Lawrence. Hence, it was about one o'clock when Philip, after taking Marjorie to the Greyhound, knocked at the vicarage door. Somewhat to his dismay, Mr. Isambard himself let him in.

"What, did you sit up for me, sir?" Philip asked.

"Yes," answered the vicar.

"I am sorry —"

"Be so good as to come into the study."

They paced across rooms of darkness to where the one light in the house illumined the most luxurious of studies. Mr. Isambard sank into a chair, took a cigar, and presented the box to Philip, saying — "Will you smoke?" Then, after an awkward silence he said, "My good fellow, you are late."

"I am sorry, sir," replied Philip again.

"No explanation?"

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"None, I'm afraid. At least, not just yet."

"I see. Nevertheless, I had hoped that you might have something hearable to say for yourself. I warn you that I am offended."

"Well, on second thoughts, I don't see why I should not tell you that I am the victim of a mischance. I — have been imprisoned in Fennell's Tower."

"Imprisoned?"

"Yes, sir."

"But — how do you mean? The place is practically a ruin. The door is never closed as far as I know."

"It was closed to-night, by some one, for some reason — and locked."

"But where were you while this was being done that you didn't see or hear the person who did it?"

"I suppose that I must have been going up the ladder inside — I really don't know."

"In that case the door must have been locked purposely by some one who had marked your entrance?"

"Oh, I don't say it was done purposely to trap me, so to speak — although I don't know; that possibility never struck me before, but it *may* be so — now you say it."

"You have been unfortunate, for during fifteen years I have not heard of the tower being closed. It is to be hoped that you had no companion in misfortune — or is that too much to hope?"

"I suppose you will hear to-morrow, sir, that a lady was with me."

"Ah? That complicates the situation rather. A woman was with you."

"I said, a lady."

"A woman and a lady are both of the same sex, and,

## *The Upshot*

in a case like the present, I'm afraid that sex is the point. If she were a lady, you have contrived to damage her reputation, Philip."

"The lady and I are about to be married, sir."

"Ah . . . ? Really? That is admirable of you! And her name?"

Philip hesitated a moment. He did not wish to discuss matters with his uncle in his present mood. The Hon. and Rev. Oliver Isambard instantly misinterpreted his silence, and allowed some of his marble wrath to escape.

"A lady! That vile creature!" he puffed.

"You had better be careful what words you use," said Philip, stung into angry speech.

"That little light-o'-love?"

"That is a peculiarly unworthy kind of lie!"

It was as if ten bombs had tumbled into the room — the granite vicar himself was struck dumb by the shock of it, and Philip, who had leaped to his feet, stood all of a tremble with one hand on his chair-back. It was Philip who first spoke, saying in the low voice of passion:

"You dare speak in that way, without even knowing who the lady is!"

"But I saw her with you on the tower," said the vicar in the white calm of intense rage.

"You saw . . . ?"

"I."

"Odd! How came you to be there?"

"That is not the point. I saw you — and your future wife; nor was I alone in seeing you, for I was sent to the tower by one who knew you were there."

"Who was that? I must know."

"It is no secret — Courthope."





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"Courthope? Which Courthope — Robert or James?"

"Robert."

"Ah!" And thus was Philip enmeshed anew in that web of poisonous deceit.

"At any rate, you perceive, my good fellow," went on the vicar, "that the affair is no secret, and that there is absolutely no way out. I have reviewed the situation on every side, and the one certainty is that we cannot go on in the old way, as if nothing had happened. If you do not marry the young woman, the vicarage will hardly continue to be your proper abode, while if, as you say, you are about to make the daughter of my friend Neyland a Warren by marriage, still the tone of the vicarage might be found inhospitable to the new ménage. I have long foreseen what might befall you some day, and have dropped hints as broad as one man may to another that your way of life and manner of thought were all too unworldly for the guiles and chances of this rather rough earth. But you have chosen your own path and walked insolently in it, sir. I also choose mine — inflexibly. Of course, you may make the vicarage your *pied à terre* for as many hours longer as you find convenient, but I warn you, my excellent Philip, that you have nothing further to expect from me, save my good wishes . . . Good-night."

"But this is beyond belief! It limits all endurance!" cried Philip, striding toward the other with outstretched hand.

The vicar, carrying an old copper candlestick high in front of his face, passed out without another word, and Philip collapsed into the chair by which he stood, threw his arms on the table, and bent his head between them.

## *The Upshot*

He was seated in that posture of desolation for over half an hour, feeling the midnight of his fate wrapped thick in fold on fold around his soul and brain.

His worldly goods amounted to two pounds, the remains of his last quarter's stipend for playing the church-organ. The question of an allowance had never been raised between him and his uncle. The vicar was a wealthy man, an avowed celibate, and it was always understood that Philip was his heir. Mr. Isambard paid all bills. The organ-playing salary was a mere joke between them. And now, by this bitter joke, Philip had two pounds to buy back Marjorie's good name? Would that pay the marriage fees? Could they make their home in the tower, living on blackberries, talking of the de Warrenne seals and roll-of-arms?

He found himself cast off, drowning, without a straw to catch at, for he knew that under the well-bred calm of his uncle's words had rolled a whole hell of anger and intent, and that of all changeless things the decisions of the vicar had the mortalist fixity. Thus in one night Philip's ground had cracked up under his feet, and his skies had rained fires round him. Asking himself how all this had suddenly come about — at first with dull movements of his mind, but presently, with sharp interest and a sense of discovery — he remembered how he and Marjorie had been brought to the tower — evidently by a ruse, with a dire purpose. "The little short gentleman" who had sent Felix to Marjorie in the shrubbery must have been Bennett, the Solicitor of Nutworth — Robert Courthope's solicitor. Then, when they were safely lodged in the tower, the door had been locked, and, some time afterwards, Robert Courthope had laughed

### *Three Men and a Maid*

loud at them in their captivity, for both Marjorie and Philip himself had recognized his guffaw in the copse below. This unexpected enemy, too, had made it his business to come to tell the vicar, and the vicar had gone and seen. . . .

It seemed to be all a contrivance of Robert Courthope to ruin and banish Philip, in order that he might secure Marjorie without instant opposition from Philip. . . . And though one should try to bridle the runaway heart and forgive one's enemies, yet there are wrongs so large and heaven-high, so over-grown and gross, that the cry of them may hardly be stifled, but all nature shrieks vengeance upon them, and forgiveness is abrogated.

When Philip lifted his weary head from the table, he did not go to his room, but rushed out of the vicarage, a wild and lurid light illuminating his brain. It was then near three in the morning, but there are calls which cannot await the dawn of day, and he made his way at a run down into the valley, then up the steep of Netherend Hill to the Hall.

Passing through the park, he approached the mansion from behind, and walked round it. No light was to be seen. It was the darkest hour of the night. The moon had set, and the breezes streamed with dismal music through the huge cedars in front of the lawn. Here, too, all was dark, but on going to the right side of the house, where the new billiard-room had been added, Philip at last saw a light, and rapped at the side-door there, whereat James Courthope, who was nodding asleep in a chair by the billiard-table, started up, and opened a window.

"Warren!" he said, in amazement; "you!"

## *The Upshot*

"I must see Robert," cried Philip. "If he is asleep he must be roused."

"He isn't asleep," answered James. "Not ten minutes since he went at a gallop towards the vicarage to knock you up. You seem to be a nice pair. What's the matter between you?"

"Gone to the vicarage? For me? That is the strangest incident of a strange night."

"What is it all about, though?" demanded James. "Look here, Warren, let me tell you you had better lie low for a day or two, if you don't want to see serious trouble of some sort between you and Robert. You lie low — take my tip. He isn't sober, and he has cut up uncommonly rough about something or other that you have done to him."

"Thank you — he has gone to the vicarage — good-bye" — and Philip was off anew, running back the way he had come. Robert Courthope, however, being mounted, had gone, not by the main-road down Nether-end Hill, but across country and by a lane which met the road on the left, and by that lane he returned, after rousing an amazed butler at the vicarage and learning that Philip was not in his room. Thus, the two men did not meet on the road, and Philip on reaching the vicarage saw no sign of life in the place. He had no intention of darkening again the doors of that home of his boyhood. Once more he set out toward the Hall, weary now, and conscious of a brightness of morning revealing itself in the east. In front of Edenhurst House he found James Courthope strolling about, smoking, and wrapped in a great-coat, with a smoking-cap pressed round his hard brows, apparently contemplating the beauty of the dawn.

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In answer to Philip's question if Robert had returned, James puffed at his cigar and said "no" — an untruth, since the Squire was at that moment sprawling on a chair in the billiard-room, staring at the dying fire.

"Well, he is apparently as eager to see me as I to see him," said Philip. "Tell him, will you, when he comes, that I am to be found in Lancault Church."

Philip then walked away, while James Courthope, eying him askance through the corner of his eye, hummed to himself. He wished to keep Philip's skin whole, at least until Philip should have married Marjorie. In his cousin's present mood, that would not be such an easy matter.

Lancault Church lay deep down in the valley, almost hidden in leafage, though part of one of its walls was visible from the Hall. Centuries ago it may have been a chapel-of-ease — for nothing tinier in the way of a church can be imagined — but it now consisted of four roofless walls buried in ivy. Philip passed through the fenced enclosure, thick with bracken, which surrounded it. He stepped over a slab, once a grave stone, which barred the doorway, and sat inside in a niche where, in happier hours, he had placed some timbers to form a seat. Then, tired with fruitless thought and misery, though aglow with the knowledge that Marjorie loved him, he turned up his coat-collar about his ears, nodded, and slept for a while.

## CHAPTER V

### DAGGERS DRAWN

THAT morning the Squire slept in a chair, Philip Warren slept in a corner of old Lancault Church, and James Courthope did not sleep at all. He had a rendezvous with Hannah Neyland at an early hour, on the outskirts of Edenhurst, where he gave her the thrilling tidings that Warren had undoubtedly been turned out of house and home, since he had gone to rest in the roofless shelter of Lancault.

"Now, my idea is this," said Courthope, "that Warren, homeless and without funds, will simply get engaged to Marjorie, to save her name, but for her sake will draw out of marriage for the present, and, going away to seek his fortune, will leave her here. That would not suit us at all, for Marjorie left here means Marjorie sooner or later Mrs. Robert Courthope."

"But do you imagine your cousin would take her now, after seeing her on the tower with Mr. Warren?" snapped Hannah, acidly.

"Your fault, by the way, that he did see her there," said Courthope. "I told you to tell no one. . . . But tower or no tower, Robert will wed her still. You don't know my Robert — he has the will of a cataract. No,

### *Three Men and a Maid*

Marjorie must not remain here. She must go with Warren, as I believe she will insist on doing when she knows that she has managed to ruin him, and the pair can rely upon what is left of Aunt Margaret's money for the present. So what you have to do now, Hannah, is to hurry home, give Marjorie the news of Warren's ruin, and drop in her ear the hint where Warren is — in Lancault Church."

Hannah managed to return to the Greyhound just in time to seem not to have gone out. After meeting the rising eyes of her father and mother, eyes which had a curious scare in them that morning, she at once made her way to Marjorie's room, to find Marjorie asleep, but fully dressed, lying in a wild attitude of unrest across the bed. It was Hannah who had let Marjorie in at one o'clock that morning, and she had pretended much sympathy and collusion with the erring sister. So now, rousing Marjorie from her careworn sleep, she was soon whispering awfully the news of Philip's downfall, and the whereabouts of Philip in the church.

Marjorie put up her hands to her hair, and said:  
"All right, dear, I will go to him."

In a few minutes she was hurrying through the hotel in a sort of concentrated flurry, tremulously unable to draw on her gloves. She escaped through a back garden without attracting notice; but, as soon as she was on the bridge crossing to Netherend Hill, she was seen by a lad named Archibald, a stable-boy, left in charge of Courthope's horse, whom his master had posted during the night to watch the time of her arrival and report her goings and comings. He followed her up the hill, saw her pass the Hall, and hurry down into the valley towards Lancault.

## *Daggers Drawn*

There was now plenty of light, though the morning was gray and wintry, and rough with the rags of the gale which had mourned all night. Wondering at this hurried expedition of Marjorie's to the little church, the lad hid behind a great oak in the field above the bracken-filled enclosure, until he saw Philip meet her. Then he ran back up to the Hall, found Robert Courthope asleep in the billiard-room, and reported what he had seen.

Marjorie, meantime, was revealing herself to Philip in the divine light of a woman who loves.

"It is I who have brought it all upon you," she said, "and you go out into the world alone; yet not alone while I live, for I go with you."

"Did I not do well to say last night that the tower was haunted by an angel?" asked Philip, with a fond smile. "But where would be my manliness to accept such an exceeding sacrifice from my dear?"

"The sacrifice would be to stay when you are gone," said Marjorie. "Let all that be taken for granted. I cannot have you feeling yourself abandoned by the world. If I were left here conscious that you were lonely and hopeless, I should — die, I think. Don't refuse me, Philip — I give myself to you."

"Dear! but the waiting may not be for long. One cannot marry on nothing a year —"

"Oh, as for the mere money part of it, that much I take upon my own shoulders, for the first six months, anyway. It will be hard if I can't make some sort of a living with my brush, as I partly have done before. And there is my aunt. You may know, Philip, dear, that my Aunt Margaret's husband left her nine thousand pounds on his death. I was a little girl when she came to live at the



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Greyhound, and for some reason or other, perhaps only because my name was something like hers, she took a fancy to me, adopted me, and devoted her money to me. There's a tradition in my mother's family, that one of them was once a famous singer. My aunt was always full of it, and she determined to send me away to be a singer. But I had no talent for singing that I could ever discover, and I did have something of the sort for painting, so after two wasted years I was allowed to throw over singing, and attempt the art schools. I was never allowed to come home, since aunt did not consider the tone of the Greyhound 'genteel'; till, on a sudden, I was recalled, some whim of aunt suddenly returning to her old love of singing and becoming dissatisfied with the painting before I was through with it. However, as soon as aunt and I met, I saw that I could induce her to do whatever I wished, and no doubt I should have been back in London at my studio weeks ago, if I hadn't met — you. That is a confession! And I only met you to undo you. Dear! I am in your hands: don't banish me from you."

"But —"

"No 'buts,' or I shall doubt what you swore on my heart last night."

"Ah, truth is strong and will prevail. You cannot doubt the ocean. Have you thought of the privations — the penurious, uncertain future?"

"I rather look forward to some privations with you. They can be made delightful if you only laugh at them."

"But —"

"No 'buts.' Any other word you may say to your love — 'butter' or 'butter-milk,' or even 'button' or 'butcher,' but not 'but.'"

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"No 'buts' then," said Philip, "since 'but' displeases you. However —"

"Ah, no 'howevers' either; 'however' is only 'but' in its Sunday-best."

"Blessed tyrant! Would you make me a pensioner of your good aunt? That can't be, can it?"

"What, not as a debt? Would you shrink from owing your wife a debt in money, when she would owe you a million in love? And you forget how proud Aunt Margaret will be to see me your wife! Just think — I, a hotel-keeper's daughter, and you more élite really than a cart-load of new-fangled barons! Think of the honor! Of her satisfied ambition! She will, and should, be only too glad to pay her all for it. So say yes . . . ah, how pale, how pale you look this morning!"

"Here is the soul of a hero in a maiden's body," murmured Philip, gazing down upon her rapturously, with his hands on her shoulders.

"You have a prejudice in favor of my soul," retorted Marjorie, "so that we need waste no time in weighing your judgment. The point is that I have won my case. You will not go alone, and if you start for London by the nine-thirty to-night, I shall then have my few belongings at the station, and I shall be standing under the Greyhound arcade, waiting for you to pass. Let us go openly. What have we to fear? We can be married as speedily as may be. Meanwhile, I shall live at my old lodgings."

"Yes!" cried Philip, suddenly, stooping to her, for, his face being turned toward the field with the oak in it, he at that moment caught sight of Robert Courthope swinging heavily across the meadow. "Yes! go now, dear — down that way — along the bank —"

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"Is it settled, then?" asked Marjorie, her heart beating with delight at his quick eagerness, for she was blissfully unaware of the Squire's rapid strides down the steep hill.

"Yes, settled," breathed Philip — "nine-thirty — good-by now —"

"But —"

"No, I have a reason. Pray go now, dearest, for my sake — follow the river bank — nine-thirty —"

She reached up her lips to be kissed, and he had to kiss her, though he knew that a witness saw. Then he led her rapidly through the bracken, over a stone barrier, and so down to the water's edge, along which he watched her, until she was hidden by some trees, though she turned twice and waved a joyous hand to him.

When he came back to the church he found Robert Courthope waiting there, looking gloomily at him, with the queer stolidity of a bull. The Squire's eyes were puffed and turgid, his aspect that of a man adrift and unguided on a sea of passions.

At the mere sight of him, of one who had been a friend, whom he took now to be a betrayer, the pallor of Philip's face gave place to a flush of indignation.

"Well, Courthope!" said he, scornfully.

The other scowled at him beneath his brows without answer.

"I went to the Hall while it was yet dark to look for you," said Philip. "I am glad I did not find you. You have done me and that lady a deep wrong, for which you deserve to be chastised to the bone, but as we both leave here for ever this very day —"

"We! Who?" broke in Robert, suddenly.

"As that lady and I are going away —"

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The Squire guffawed loudly, in the coarse banal way which sounded so strangely from the mouth of a man of birth and breeding.

"Laugh who wins! I understand that it must be bitter to you, Courthope, to see your scheme brought all to naught, for though you have the satisfaction of getting me disinherited, the pearl of price remains on my side. Marjorie goes with me, if you can digest it, Courthope —"

"No, never!"

"Oh, but she does."

"And where do *I* — where do *I* — come in?"

"You don't come in, Courthope — you keep out."

"Better not anger me beyond endurance!"

"You are already angered, and I care not to what extent, though, I must confess, I enjoy the sight of your impotent furies."

"But what wrong have I ever done you?" came the frenzied cry. "Why should you strike me such a blow in the back, man? Haven't I been your lifelong friend? Why should you stab at me because you are the younger man, and have a handsomer face to look at, and can talk small with the women, d—n you? What wrong have I done you? You knew that I had set my heart on winning a girl's love, and, just because of that, you step in, and wheedle her away with your mincing cavalier manners. Curse you! Why are you so bitter against me!"

"So it is I who have done the wrong? Not you? How dared you turn the key of that tower, Courthope?"

"Tower! I know nothing about any key —"

"Ah, you lie, Courthope. You forget that we heard your drunken laugh from the top. Mr. Isambard, too,

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has told me that it was you who sent him there. You were lucky that I didn't catch you last night, really."

"Well, you've got me now," thundered the Squire, heedless of all save his passion and the taunt thrown at him, "and, what's more, I've got you; and one of us goes under. Mine isn't a boy's love! — it's all hot hell and high heaven to me — and you shouldn't have put in your smooth face, curse you, with your play-acting, for yours *is* all play, and dastardly at that, thinking to tamper with a young woman's life when you haven't a penny to call your own —"

"Ah?" growled Philip, touched in a sore place, "you first reduce me to beggary by a coward's trick, and then boast of it to me?" I have heard of curs, Courthope —"

But the other thrust aside the imputation as a bull oft disregards the picador's lance.

"I am thinking of the girl's good as well as of my own," he said obstinately. "It was arranged between her father and me that she should become the lady of all this place, till you interfered. And you, what do you offer her? I am only talking common sense! I am not upbraiding any one for his poverty! But will you feed and clothe her on your old books, or your rapier, and the de Warrenne roll-of-arms? If you really cared for her as a man, I swear that I'd try to swallow it all; but, you see, you don't; it's only a boy's fancy against a man's life and passion, life and passion, by God! If you take her away, you do so across my dead body, Warren!"

"Even so, she goes," cried Philip, with a redder seam on his forehead.

"Good! Said like a man! Gad! I hardly expected it

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of you. Let's fight for her!" cried back the Squire, trembling throughout his huge frame.

"There is no need for me to fight for her," said Philip. "She is already mine."

"That's where you're wrong," bellowed Courthope. "She is more mine than yours, as you'll see! Do you mean that her girl's fancy is for the moment on your side? True enough, apparently! But on my side is power, man, ownership, her father's wishes, all her interests, the oath of my own heart's blood. Yours? Already yours, is she? Why, in an hour's time her father will have her well locked up for me, until such time as she comes to her senses. If she escaped, I'd have her captured like a runaway schoolgirl. Yours, you say? Not yet, quite! *Mine*, you mean — Warren, I warn you! But, come! I'll be generous. You may fight for her, if it will comfort you to see the color of your blood, since you say that you've taken her fancy. I'll fight you with the small-sword."

"I should have little to gain —" began Philip, carried out of himself by his adversary's cool truculence.

"Yes, you would," broke in Courthope. "I have it all arranged in my head, for I have seen clearly all this damnable night that one or other of us must go under in this quarrel, and, if it is I who fall, that solves for you the difficulty of the poverty, since you marry Marjorie a rich woman, for to-day I make over to her about all that I possess. . . . There, you can't have it fairer than that. If you take her, you have my all with her. It's Marjorie I'm thinking of, mark you, her good first. So whichever of us wins her has the money with her. Damn it, man, that's fair. Let's fight it out with our bodies."

Philip stood silent with his eyes cast down; then, in that

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mortal moment, there came from him the murmur: "Courthope, you tempt me."

"What do you say?" asked Courthope. "I didn't hear you. Is it to be now or later on? Only cowards put off to next week things that are bound to happen some time."

"Courthope," cried out Philip, "I warn you that I am bitter against you! I might kill you, Courthope, if we fought!"

"Kill me? Try it! It's bitter against bitter, I tell you, and let the bitterer of the two bite to the heart! Kill me, is it? Far better you did that than rob me of my promised wife. Well, I'm ready to be killed! Give me the day to settle my affairs, and we meet on this spot to-night."

"But it is you who ask it, remember, Courthope, not I!" came the protest. "If the spirits of my forefathers, who fought manfully in many a quarrel, watch me now, they would hardly own me were I to shrink from a challenge so direct and boastful. But it is you who press it, Courthope, remember, though you know — though you *know* — that I am your master with a rapier."

"No, I didn't know — it's news to me," said the Squire, heedlessly. "If you are my master, so much the better for you, eh?"

"And if you fall, you give up Marjorie absolutely and forever, Courthope, even if you recover?"

"Well, I suppose I am a man of my word. Yes, whoever falls in this fight parts then and there with all hope of Marjorie. And if it be you, you disappear from here for not less than five years. You hold no communication with Marjorie. You vanish out of her life. Is it agreed?"

"Yes. The same conditions hold good for you?"

"I pledge my word to it. Five years let it be! And

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let's both commend our souls to the High God above us, Warren, for, mark you, it's a fight to the finish, till one or other of us is done for or disarmed."

"Let it be so, Courthope. You have brought it on yourself, whatever chastisement befalls you."

"Well, we'll see how it turns, and may the fates give the victory to the best-meaning of us two! I'll send off now post-haste for my lawyer, and before night-fall all that I own, that's not entailed, shall be Marjorie Neyland's — and yours, if you floor me."

"That is as you please," said Philip, stung by the constant allusions to his poverty. "I have only to make the condition that you be here by eight-thirty, since I have to be with that lady at the station an hour later."

"Thank your stars, man, that you are so certain of it . . ." muttered Courthope.

He left Philip standing there with the awfulest pang which his heart had yet known. Courthope climbed the steep meadow by which he had come, but his cousin, James, who had crept up from the tree-shaded river-bank, and heard most of this interview, lay in the bracken, till Robert was out of sight, and then crouched back like a fox. Turning once, when he had reached the shelter of some trees, he saw Philip Warren at the little barrier-slab in the enclosure, with his elbow on his knee, and his chin on his palm, in the depth of thought.

The spy instantly hastened to the Hall, where he made for the stables with the breathless question: "Has any one been sent off to Nutworth?"

The answer was: "Yes — Archibald has just been despatched in haste by the Squire with a message to Bennett, the solicitor."



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"Saddle me Emperor," cried Courthope, and in some minutes he was gone, galloping on his cousin's swiftest hunter. It was a long ride, but on the outskirts of Nutworth he passed Archibald. He was in converse with Bennett before the groom alighted at the office-door, which had only just been opened, for little Mr. Bennett was hanging up his hat and overcoat when Courthope burst in upon him, showing a face as inflamed with the passion of inalice as that small lawyer had ever beheld.

"Disinherit *me*!" Courthope hissed. "That is the game. You are to be called to make a will, a deed-of-gift, something, in favor of Marjorie Neyland — the messenger is now at your door. There's a fight with small-swords on — to-night — Robert will be killed — both he and Warren are rabid with rage — Warren thinks it was Robert who locked him up in the tower, — and the fight to be to a finish! Robert will be killed, sure, Warren's the better man —"

"Stop a bit! Sit down! I can't take it all in at once —" protested Bennett, whose ever pale face moved not a muscle, though a light leaped to his eyes.

"There's no *time*, you've got to take it in," cried Courthope, wiping his brow. "There's a messenger outside, I tell you, and you'll probably find the day too short for all. The question is as to *the witnesses* to this document which you have to draw up. If Robert is killed to-night, and you destroy the deed, the witnesses will want to know what the deuce has become of the thing —"

"But is it certain that I shall destroy anything?" asked Bennett. "Whatever disposition your cousin chooses to make of his property —"

"Bennett, don't be a frivolous fool, when I tell you

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there's no time for humbug. You won't destroy it, you'll hand it to me to destroy for you — just for perfect safety, you see. I quite mean, by the way, to be liberal as to your share in this particular deal, though all that must be left to my generosity — *you* have no voice in it. Bennett, you force me to be blunt anew with each fresh piece of rascality we do together. Do you want accountants to audit the estate books? But don't let us go over the old ground again. The question now is about these witnesses. Whom are you going to get?"

The solicitor seemed to be overborne by the whirl of James Courthope's demands and threats.

"There's Jeffry, my clerk," he muttered.

"Yes, my friend, but it's the devil's own business this time. Are you sure that Jeffry is sound to the very heart?"

"Jeffry is all right," mumbled Bennett, lighting a cigarette with a shaking hand.

"And as to the other witness?" asked Courthope.

"Can you suggest any one?"

"Look here, I suggest Hannah Neyland —"

"What, the devisee's own sister? That might be risky, even though —"

"Do as I say. There's no one but Hannah, so you recommend her to Robert as the best of witnesses, being sister to the legatee. That's it! She and Jeffry let it be. Now, you can admit the groom — I'm back home. . . ."

Upon which James Courthope hurried out, mounted, and rode hard for the Hall, whence he at once sent a note to Hannah, bidding her meet him at the bottom of the Greyhound orchard. There, near noon, he acquainted her with all that was impending, and instructed her to be in readiness to be called to the Hall as a witness, giving

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her his orders and revealing everything in his heart and mind with that masterful confidence which men have in the women who are their slaves, never taking into account the possibility of change in the heart, or of the coming of that hour in which the woman hates and the slave mutinies.

Thus the day wore on. Marjorie, for two hours, was at her Aunt Margaret's knees, coaxing with all her arts, winning pardon for the last night's escapade, now in the mouth of all Hudston, insisting on the dignity of being the wife of Philip Warren, the cream of aristocratic cream, and gaining the connivance of a heart withered yet full of romance in the running-away planned for that night.

The girl was all a-quiver with joy and hope. Little she dreamed that Philip Warren was even then waiting in Lovers' Walk near the bridge for Felix to come with his small-sword. For, from his retreat at Lancault, Philip had come down near to the village, though he would not enter it, and had hung about until he spied Felix, had asked Felix first to buy him a loaf of bread and some milk, and then sent him with a note to Davenport, the vicarage butler, to bring him his rapier.

About the same hour of the afternoon, Hannah was summoned to the Hall, and when Mr. Bennett said to her, "There — sign just there," she bent with her hat and gloves on, over a document.

"No, no; glove off, please," said the lawyer.

She smiled and obeyed.

The Squire was looking silently out of a window at the clouded sun, a sun which, perhaps, he was not destined to behold on the morrow. He paid no heed to Hannah, or the documents even, once he had read them. It never

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occurred to him, being a man of one idea, that Bennett might play him false.

And so the long day sped. The gale had died away, but the heavens were gray and heavy, and here and there in the air fluttered some flakes of the year's first snow.

As the sun set, Philip tore a sheet from his pocketbook and, lying on his face over the grave-slabs which paved the little church, wrote on it with a pencil:

"If I be found dead, be it understood that I have neither destroyed myself nor been murdered, but fell in fair and equal duello with a gentleman whom I have as earnestly sought to wound as he to wound me. God assoilzie my soul. Amen.

"PHILIP WARREN."

This he put into his pocket, and sat, waiting for the rising of the moon, and the foot of his rival.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DE WARRENNE SIGNET-RING

THE two men took their stand in the church at opposite ends of it, the length of the tiny building lying east and west. Robert Courthope stood at the east end, Philip Warren at the west, near the little door in the south wall with a slab across it to bar the entrance of predatory cattle.

So small was the space within there, that when they had taken distance, their backs were only some few feet from the two walls, so that much play in the way of retreat was out of the question for either. It was not quite half-past eight, and over the ivy that clustered on the east gable-end the moon looked mistily down upon the gravestones and grasses, peered between the roofless walls, and searched the two hearts which hotly stormed there over the bones of the old dead. The weather had grown bitterly cold, and the tiny flakes of snow straying at times into the ruined church did not melt on the bared steel.

Despite the passion impatiently pent within them, the two men went through the whole rite of the salute as in their usual practice for healthful amusement. They took position and distance, with recognition to the left, and

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recognition to the right, engagement in tierce, and saluting with the swords. Courthope, being the elder, took distance first, and became the attacker.

Down now they settled their weight on their thighs, with knees bent, right feet forward, left hands hung up in the air behind their heads, the length of steel out in their right, — and they set themselves to stab and parry. As Courthope lunged high up in the inside line to Philip's left, and Philip took opposition in quarte, a solitary wind that arose went away moaning of it to the moors, and for what seemed a long time no other sound was to be heard there, but the rasping of the blades, or a breath from their throats, or, it might be, a mortal thumping of human hearts in all their trouble and plight.

Here was no meeting guided by blind chance, since each knew the other's style, little plots, and tricks, and feints, to the last degree, and each long since had become a master of the game. Though Robert Courthope's manner of life was never such as to admit of a high fitness of all the muscles of the body, he was big-handed, strong in play of thumb and forefinger, and he had this pull over Warren, that Philip was something of a pedant in the art, and even now, in a supreme moment of his life, stuck to old-fashioned tricks and ways, not because he thought them good, but merely because they were old, making the antiquated *appel* with the sole of the foot in his lunges, engaging too much in low lines with old-world parries, and the like.

Still, to an onlooker there could have been small doubt from the first as to which of the two was the better man here. Within one minute Courthope's blood spurted, when, on a disengage from tierce into quarte, Philip

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parried quarte with a tap as sharp as a gun-lock's click. While his adversary stood forward on the lunge, disconcerted by the driving off of the blade, he lunged back with the *tac-au-tac* riposte — a lightning movement of the arm without a stirring of the body — and drew red from the breast.

Courthope was in retreat to the very wall at his back. "Hit! sir," panted Warren, but there was no answer, for on the instant Courthope was at it again, planted on guard, again engaged in quarte, with so furious a quickness that Philip met the threatening rapier with his own point rather too low, upon which Courthope vigorously attacked, seizing the forte of Warren's blade with the faible of his own, passing his point over Warren's hilt, and lunging in the exterior line with the hand turned upward, at the same time taking marked opposition to the right. But to this twist-and-lunge assault, always one of Courthope's strongest, Warren was no stranger. Having in an instant righted himself from his surprise, he yielded his sword completely at first to Courthope's thrust without losing touch, dropping his hand, raised his point deftly, so that the blades were again in the quarte position, and taking opposition in that line, escaped with little more than a scratch. In another moment, his body remaining in the position of guard, he had his arm extended in a feint in tierce, upon which Courthope, startled at the sight of the point so close to him, almost involuntarily attempted to parry in tierce.

And now Warren, lowering his point, lunged, and would have struck his enemy deeply in seconde, but for a retreat which again brought Courthope's back to the wall, and a breath burdened with foreboding from the depth of his breast.

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Yet, darting forward anew to the fight, desperate now, panting, growing all loose in wind and will, he again engaged Warren in the inner line in quarte, and sought to make the straight thrust. It was useless. Warren had taken strong opposition to the left, so Courthope made a *coupé*, heaving up his point by the action of his thumb and forefinger to attack his foe in an outside line. This, too, came to naught, for Warren, describing a circle with his point, again caught Courthope's blade, and giving it a rap once more took opposition in quarte.

At this point Courthope boiled with an inward heat to have the deadly traffic done with. He beat upon Warren's blade to paralyze and get it out of the way so that he might pierce his adversary's body and make an end, and, when his intent was balked, he attacked Warren's blade by pressure — the two swords all this while being in quarte — pressing his enemy's steel outward and outward, with all his own five fingers at work upon his own hilt, pressing while his teeth grinned, pressing with the vigor of his manhood heaved into the evil strain, his brow grown red and ribbed, and from his mouth gasped forth the groan:

“God! What a wrist!”

That wrist of Warren's was grim enough, and the effort lasted not long: Warren attempted to snatch a lunge, but the next moment was parrying in tierce. He met Courthope's blade smartly. Courthope's point was too low, and Warren, seizing with the forte of his sword the point-end of Courthope's, with a vigorous pressure of all the fingers brought his point down to Courthope's hilt, keeping touch meanwhile, and so giving the opposing sword a scrape which would have unnerved many a hand.



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It perhaps unnerved Courthope's, but the certain result was not attained, for, at the very culmination of the deadly attack, as it were, the moon above them went out, or hid her face, and refused to witness the imminent disaster. It was so sudden, this diving into cloud of their only light, that for the moment both men were blinded and made distraught by it. Neither could have recounted what movements of the swords were made during the next few seconds. Warren had an idea that Courthope again essayed the flanconnade attack with engagement in quarte, and that he again parried, or almost parried.

But the next thing which distinctly arose there in that gloom of two poor human spirits struggling in their mortal straits, and that darkening of the sky and night about them, was a cry from the heart of Warren which he could hardly smother. He was not wounded, only slightly pricked in the middle finger of the right hand, but into the whirl and distraction of his mind the consciousness suddenly had birth that his signet-ring, the lucky-stone of his race, had been snapped, and was gone. The finger in which it had embedded itself since his boyhood felt itself light of the ring. He had lost his talisman!

With that gasping of Warren's bosom a sob now mingled itself. He fought on manfully, despairingly, but from that moment the fight was really done, for Philip seemed to be fighting against that which is more than man. Indeed, such a thing as the snapping of the ring in the very acme of his flurry of soul had naturally upon him the fatalest effects. Immediately afterwards he found himself engaged in quarte with Courthope, but in his disarray of mind, his point was much too low. A little light was sent down by the burrowing moon. Robert Courthope

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easily now seized the faible of his foe's sword with the forte of his, and by a powerful but intensely swift sweep forced down Philip's blade into seconde with a paralyzing scrape and twist which quite loosened the weapon in the strong hand which had held it. . . .

And then, Philip Warren's small-sword clattered down upon the grave-slabs and grass!

"Got you, Warren — disarmed!" came in the faintest pant from the depths of Courthope's heart, while, with shortened sword, he held Warren pinned against the west wall.

"Courthope — have mercy — kill me!" toiled in the broken breath of utter agony from Warren's breast.

"No, I don't — got you — disarmed!" gasped Courthope again.

"Kill, man!"

"No — got you — God!"

"Will you? Won't you, then?"

"No — keep your word — disarmed —"

"Courthope, I conjure you!"

"No — disarmed, Warren."

"For God's sake, Courthope!"

"No, keep your word!"

"Yes, but finish it, man!"

"No. I have your pledged word . . . Yes, God, disarmed!"

"I lost my ring —"

"Which ring? . . . Go — nine-thirty — five years."

"Let me look —"

"No, go — keep your word —"

"Don't pin me! Give me room! How dare you . . .?"

"Do you keep your word?"

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"Yes, but air to breathe, let me look —"

"No — you're beaten. You must go now — by the nine-thirty train — five years!"

Those were Robert Courthope's last recorded words on earth. An ungovernable frenzy of passion boiled up in Warren's blood, and with such a fury did he spring empty-handed upon his victorious rival, that Courthope, taken unaware, was on his back on the gravestones before either man knew what had happened. Then Philip, unnerved and horrified, scared at himself, at the eruption of his own rage, at the tarnishing of his honor, leapt the slab across the entrance, and was running wild, plunging through the bracken, over the boundary-stone, down to the water-side and along it, as if flying from death, his hair lifting on the winds, his eyes agaze with suffering. By the time he reached the bridge he was quite breathless, but still at a mechanical trot he went on, over the bridge, up the steep of the village street, and the three or four boys and girls still playing at that hour out of doors gaped at the sight of the distracted man who rushed past them.

On to the Greyhound on his left he went, and past it to the arcade on its south wall stretching down the alley, under which, all alone, stood Marjorie awaiting him — Marjorie, gloved and hatted, ready to go with him, wondering why he was late, her trunks already smuggled out of the hotel to the station by connivance of Hannah and her aunt.

By a sideward look down the alley Philip saw her. In her sudden distress it seemed to her that he had forgotten her — he seemed hardly to recognize her for a moment, his stare was so fixed and glassy. Nor did he stop. When she, in her awe of surprise, made a step to follow

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him, he stretched out his left hand backward at her to stop her with such an aspect of gloomy warning in his look as her heart likened to the gaze of lost mortals, nor ever forgot to her dying day.

In spite of herself she was struck rigid by it, for that forbidding hand was as peremptory as a law of fate, and she saw him disappear round a corner toward the railway with no more power to stir after him than if his fiat had turned her into stone.

She stood there, wan and immovable, until she heard the puffing of the departing train, and the rumble of its wheels. Feeling deeply now her loneliness of heart, and a darkness that rolled about her like a shroud, her head dropped little by little, she put her face into her hands, and wept passionately, pitifully, mourning the shattering of a dream.

## CHAPTER VII

### OVER THE BODY

ALL that night the Squire did not return to the Hall, and in the morning, by nine o'clock, from the house-keeper's room to the stables, questions began to arise. James Courthope, too, was not at home, but his whereabouts were known. At Allonby, seven miles distant, the first hunt-ball of the season had taken place the night before. Thither he had gone, and there had passed the night; nor was it till eleven in the forenoon that he came riding slowly at a walk up through the park with a mounted groom behind him, carrying his valise on the pommel. Robert Courthope should have gone to that ball, too, and had been greatly missed.

Before James could alight, he had heard the news — the Squire had not slept in the Hall, had not been there to breakfast — in a word, the Squire was gone, and none knew whither.

It became noon. James sent a man to make inquiries at the Greyhound and the railway station — no news.

Then, about one o'clock, a group of five small boys, with Felix, the idiot, towering ungainly in the midst of them, ran up the park through the northwest gate, for Felix, though a grown man, was playfellow with the

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smallest boys, and often, if any one met him crying, and asked him what was the matter, he would reply that the boys had been refusing to play with him, and had left him desolate. These restless spirits, having wandered into Lancault Church, were now running back quicker than they had gone. Chancing to meet a woodman as they pressed toward the Hall, they cast upon him the blighting statement that the Squire lay stiff dead in "T'Owd Church."

And lie there he did, in grim truth, with a long, slim sword sticking up straight out of his heart, like a reed of steel sprung out of him.

Within another half-hour the thing was all abroad. Hudston thrilled it to York, and York to London, and London called back that this crime was great and mortal. The red Squire lay on his bed, all his scarlet changed to everlasting jaundice now, and by his side stood P. C. Bates, of Hudston, and others with heavy looks, while Hudston threw dust on its head, for the man had been loved. At the Greyhound, Marjorie Neyland, who was unwell and in bed, on hearing of it, somehow sighed and fainted — she could not have explained to herself quite why, and Hannah, white and dry-lipped, pleaded that she must tend her sister and not be disturbed.

Men's minds were so stunned with sorrow and dread that the questions of how and why hardly at first found room for themselves, and the day, a Friday, passed in mourning; but by the Saturday morning it was being whispered everywhere that Philip Warren had murdered the Squire, and by one o'clock, when a jury of Hudston farmers and shopkeepers had viewed the body, then lying in funeral pomp under its pall in the Hall library,

### *Three Men and a Maid*

all the world was agog with but one interest — the quest into the guilt and whereabouts of the assassin.

The board-school, where Dr. Craigie, the coroner, had decided to hold the inquest, could not contain half of those who pressed for entrance. The countryside was keen to hear, and the pressmen who gathered were not merely local, but had come from afar. Several different interests were legally represented, the police by Mr. Whitaker of Allonby, James Courthope by Bennett of Nutworth, while the vicar had mercifully retained Mr. Hardinge, also of Nutworth, to speak for his fugitive nephew. With the Superintendent from Allonby and P. C. Bates was one Inspector Webster, lent to the Yorkshire police by Scotland Yard. The vicar himself was present as a witness; Mr. Bullen, one of the bench of county magistrates, was there; so was Marjorie, looking as wan as her attire was black, with Hannah, and many witnesses from the Hall.

The finding of the body was described by two of the boys, for Felix was not called, and then P. C. Bates gave the details of his first sight of the dead man.

"There was only one sword on the spot," he said in answer to Mr. Whitaker for the police, and he was emphatic that it was sticking almost perpendicularly upward from the breast into which it had been deeply planted. The Squire's hat lay a good way from his head, almost under the east wall, while the body itself lay on its back near the west wall, its feet pointing to the wall. All the pockets of the deceased were empty, but for the watch in his waistcoat, and three shillings in a trouser-pocket. There was no handkerchief, no papers, nothing noticeable about, except part of a loaf of bread, some crumbs, and

## Over the Body

the trampled look of the grass and nettles toward the west end. It was only after he had well examined the interior, and was looking about outside, that he found the blood-stained handkerchief produced. Hung up on the external west wall was a piece of board bearing the words, "Any person found damaging this chapel will be prosecuted," and crumpled up behind the board he had discovered the handkerchief in question. At once, on opening it, he had seen that it had belonged to the deceased, from the initials "R. C." in the corner, and, from the long, narrow character of the blood-stains, he took it for granted that the handkerchief had been used to wipe blood from some such thing as a rapier.

The handkerchief was handed gingerly about among the jury.

"As to the removing of the sword from the body," asked Mr. Hardinge, who appeared for his friend, Philip Warren, "did it come out easily? The point did not seem to have fixed itself into any bone?"

"It come easy enough, sir," answered Bates.

"Easy enough," repeated Mr. Hardinge, a large lawyer, with side-whiskers, and a bullying manner, while the public wondered what he was driving at. "But tell me this — *where* was the deceased's jacket at the moment when you first saw the body — on or off?"

"Off, sir."

"Off!" cried the lawyer, "and is it possible, officer, that you omit so vital a fact from your deposition? Did you forget to mention it?"

"Not so much that I forgot —" began Bates.

"No, but that the police have a case to make out!" and, while Bates shifted his legs, Mr. Hardinge asked again:



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"Where exactly was the deceased's jacket?"

"Against the east wall, not far from his hat," Bates admitted, amid a murmur of the court.

Dr. Lawrence of Hudston next described the state of the body in detail; it had been dead at least twelve hours, probably longer, at the time of the finding. In addition to the fatal stab, there were three others, which he described. The only serious wound had passed clean through one of the left chambers of the heart, and beyond.

"And you are sure," asked Mr. Hardinge, springing up, "that the other three wounds were inflicted by the same weapon?"

"By the same or a similar weapon."

"They were not deep wounds?"

"No, shallow flesh-wounds."

It now began to seem clear that the defence of Philip Warren was to take the line that no assassination had been committed, but that the Squire had met his death in a fencing bout, in spite of the damning fact that only one sword had been found in the church.

The witnesses followed each other fast. Davenport, butler at the vicarage, told of his receipt of the note from Philip by the hand of Felix on the fatal afternoon, asking him to send Mr. Warren's small-sword.

"And you duly sent it?" asked Mr. Whitaker of Allonby for the police.

"Yes," was the hardly heard answer, followed by a droning of the thronged school-room at the pity of that sending.

"You identify this weapon as the sword which you sent to Philip Warren?" was the next question, and the

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sword found in the body was handed to the witness, who, after looking at it, identified it.

"You have long known that sword as Mr. Warren's?"

"Yes, sir."

But as Whitaker was in the act of sitting, up started Hardinge, to challenge Davenport with the question, "Where is the note sent you by Mr. Warren on the fatal afternoon?"

Davenport answered that he had mislaid it, had hunted everywhere, but had failed to find it.

"And you are convinced that what Mr. Warren asked you for was his short-sword, not his foil?"

"No, the sword."

"You know, however, that Mr. Warren and the deceased have long been in the habit of fencing with the foils in a regular way once or twice each week?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have seen them at it?"

"Oh, yes. Many of the folk about have seen them."

"Which do you say was the better man of the two at the foil?"

"I always understood that Mr. Warren was."

"And you are sure that the sword which you just examined is Mr. Warren's?"

"Sure, sir."

"Just have another look," said Mr. Hardinge, catching up a sword from his side, and thrusting it hurriedly into the witness's hands, whereat Davenport, looking closely at it, said, "Yes, sir; this is Mr. Warren's."

"But it is *not*!" cried the lawyer, amid some sensation. "It happens to be one of Squire Courthope's swords!"

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"Oh, I protest," cried Mr. Whitaker, half rising, "this is a mere trick to delude a witness."

"It is a trick the importance of whose result the gentlemen of the jury will not fail to realize," said Hardinge. "I wished to impress upon them that the sword or swords of Warren and those of the deceased are so alike that they cannot be distinguished, and consequently that the sword found in the body, and identified as Mr. Warren's, may not be Mr. Warren's at all!"

The point, however, rather failed to impress a jury already convinced that the fatal weapon could only be Warren's. And now followed a scrutiny into the history of the two men on the Thursday and days preceding it, dragging out into the sunshine that canker of gall and jealousy which had rankled with results so mortal. Jonas Neyland told of the Squire pacing in the drawing-room of the Greyhound, hour after hour, and Marjorie not to be found. And Marjorie, veiled and in black, had to tell of the round-tower, and of the unsolved riddle of the plot which had inveigled her thither, and of the curiously malicious laugh which she and Philip had heard from the top, and recognized as Courthope's. She spoke of the coming home to the Greyhound with Philip in the dark of the morning; and of how, when it was light, she had heard from her sister that he had been cast adrift by the vicar and was at Lancault. She had hastened to him there, and persuaded him to let her depart for London in the same train with him in the evening. By agreement, she was waiting under the Greyhound arcade when she had seen him pass, and he had forbidden her to follow him.

"Did he stop?" asked Mr. Whitaker.

"No," answered Marjorie.

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"Did he call out to you not to follow?"

"No, he said nothing."

"Then, in what manner did he forbid you to follow?"

"He put out his hand backward toward me."

"Did you notice anything strange about him?"

She was silent for a while and her trembling was visible to all in the court. Presently she said, "He seemed agitated."

"Is that all? *Very* agitated? *Wildly* agitated?"

"Distinctly agitated."

"As a man would be who had just perpetrated a crime, and was flying from justice?"

Marjorie made some answer which was not heard.

"We did not quite catch —" began Mr. Whitaker.

"He looked very agitated," she answered.

"So that was all you noticed, that he looked wildly and guiltily agitated, and put out his hand backward to annul the travelling arrangement made between you that morning? Did you notice nothing else whatever? No sign of blood on his clothes?"

"No."

"Nor on his hand?"

There came no answer. Whitaker waited a little.

"Come now — on his hand?" he asked.

"Well, on his hand."

"Ah! Blood on the hand which he stretched backward to you?"

"No, on his right hand. I thought it had been cut —"

"But blood is blood, whether his own or someone else's, surely? You could hardly see all in a moment, when you must have been in a state of no little dismay at the change in your plans, whether the blood was from a cut —"

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"I think that I can say so. I think that I noticed a long sort of scratch, as I certainly noticed something else."

"And that was?"

"His ring, which he always wore on the middle finger of the right hand, was not there, though it was there in the morning when I saw him; and I should like to say that, if he had lost the ring, that fact might be sufficient, in my opinion, to account for the agitation of which I have given evidence."

"What!" cried the lawyer with a touch of sarcasm in his voice, "the loss of a ring to send a man flying wildly in that way? Do you consider that a reasonable statement, Miss Neyland?"

"Yes. It was not an ordinary ring. He has long believed the ring to be a talisman of his house, and that its separation from him might mean lifelong calamity."

"I see. During your intercourse with Warren have you always considered him quite sane?"

She lifted her eyes in quick contempt. "Yes," she answered.

"That question seems to surprise you," said the lawyer.

"Not really," she said in a clear way. "I have often read that it is a marked trait of lunacy to suspect insanity in others."

Mr. Whitaker suddenly sat, and up sprang Mr. Harding to ask whether, since she was able to note the scratch on Warren's hand, and the absence of the ring, Marjorie had not thought it likely that the means by which the ring was removed were probably identical with those which caused the scratch.

"I was in too great confusion of mind to think,"

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answered Marjorie, "though what you say now seems very reasonable."

She was followed by the vicar, with his inscrutable face, and the court now heard how, in going home from the sick-bed of his curate, he had met Robert Courthope running from the direction of the round-tower, and had been told that his nephew was at that moment on the tower with a lady; whereat Mr. Isambard had strolled in that direction, and, without revealing himself, had witnessed the truth of the Squire's words.

"What were the two on the tower doing at the moment when you saw them?" asked Mr. Whitaker.

"Is the question pertinent?" asked Mr. Hardinge, half rising.

"It may be," said the coroner.

"The couple seemed to be engaged in a tender passage," said Mr. Isambard, "seeing which, I, of course, stole away" — whereat a murmur of disapprobation arose at the scandal, every man feeling a little jealous of Philip, and every woman of Marjorie; and Hannah, sitting next her sister, cast down her eyes with a blush, as if she had never heard of such things before, while Jonas threw up his hands and eyes together. As for Martha and Aunt Margaret they had not been subpoenaed to appear, and, glad enough to be away from all the revelation and to-do, sat in the Greyhound with their hands on their mouths.

Then came the story of Philip's and the vicar's parting, how the vicar had sat up waiting till the small hours for Philip to come, how Philip had declared that he had been locked up in the tower, and how the vicar had then washed his hands of his nephew.

"But did you believe, sir, your nephew's story about

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the tower door having been locked upon him?" asked Mr. Hardinge.

"I — pretended, of course, to believe," said Mr. Isambard.

"But did you believe?"

"No."

"Yet it was true, sir."

"So I now understand."

"If you had but believed, your subsequent conduct to the young man would no doubt have been very different? And if that were different, all else might have been different?"

"I did not believe him. The door of that tower has never been locked before," said Mr. Isambard.

"Surely you have always known your nephew to be a person of the strictest veracity?"

"Yes."

"And after a lifetime of truth, when he happens to tell you a somewhat improbable, though true, story, you disbelieve him so flatly?"

"That is so. Remember, however, that I had just seen him in a situation implying to my mind some moral obliquity — on that tower-top — after midnight; and one sort of moral obliquity, to a man who knows the heart, renders moral obliquities in other directions very possible."

"You now know that your poor nephew was guilty neither of the one sort of moral obliquity nor the other?"

"So it seems now."

"Would it not have been sheer Christian charity, sir, to believe him when he assured you that the tower-door had been locked upon him?"

"Gentlemen, I admit that I was wrong," said the vicar

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— words which he then used for the first time in his life, probably; and a hush of sympathy with the strong man's bowed head pervaded the court during a brief space.

"Looking back now over all the circumstances, did Mr. Robert Courthope, on meeting you in the land, give you any grounds for thinking that it was he who had locked the tower-door upon the pair?" Mr. Hardinge next asked.

"None," answered the vicar; "he did not even imply in any way that the tower-door was locked. Otherwise I must have listened to my unhappy nephew's explanation."

The vicar returned to his seat on the platform by the coroner, and as James Courthope rose and walked to the spot where the witnesses were sworn, Hannah Neyland's face went slowly white to the hue of death, and she hastily dropped a veil.

Courthope told of that night before his cousin's last; how he, James, was sitting up far into the morning when Robert came home rather enraged and stormy, saying that he had seen Miss Marjorie Neyland and Mr. Warren on Fennell's Tower, and uttering a few threats. Robert had then ordered a meal, had drunk rather deeply, had flung himself on a horse, and had galloped off to the vicarage to confront Warren. While he was gone, Warren, evidently also in a rage, had come to seek him. He, James Courthope, had counseled Warren to lie low a while, but Warren, on hearing that Robert had gone to the vicarage, had himself started back for the vicarage, had again missed Robert, and had again returned to the Hall, yet very eager to get hold of Robert. But the witness had put him off with some excuse that Robert was



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out, though Robert was really then at home, and Warren had then left a message for Robert that he was to be found at Lancault, and had actually gone there, by which time the day was breaking.

Inspector Webster of Scotland Yard at this point whispered to his lawyer, Mr. Whitaker, who, standing up, made the remark to James Courthope:

"You spent a sleepless night that night?"

"A habit of mine," answered Courthope, ever courteous and self-reliant, sifting between his fingers the ends of his pointed blonde beard.

"Did you in the morning give to the deceased Warren's message that he was to be found at Lancault?"

"No, of course not. I didn't want to help forward any disagreement between them."

"Now, on coming home in the angry humor which you have described, did the deceased suggest to you any means by which he thought that that tower-door could have become locked?"

"Yes, he mentioned that he himself had locked it."

"He did? And did he mention his motive for conduct so singular?"

"I think he said that he had been informed that the two people were there on the tower, that he had gone and seen them, and I assumed that from some motive of spite he then imprisoned them."

"But," said Mr. Whitaker, "we know it was near midnight when he saw them, and it was soon after seven, Miss Marjorie Neyland says, when she found herself locked in, at which hour we know that the Squire was at the Greyhound, expecting her return. How, then, could the Squire have locked her in?"

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"I'm sure I can't explain it," said James Courthope, "unless he locked them in by the hand of an agent."

"But — could he have expected her with so much impatience — at the Greyhound, knowing all the time that she was locked in?"

"I only repeat, sir, what he told me, and I say that I can't explain it — unless his impatience at the hotel was a pretense to cover the fact that he had locked them in."

"Was that very like your cousin, Robert Courthope, whom we all knew? A long hypocrisy? Was he of that sort?"

"No, certainly. But perhaps the young lady is mistaken as to the hour when she found herself locked in — a likely mistake, for love eats up time."

"Yes, love eats up time — but, though love affects a lady's heart, and even her brain, can it ever be so powerful as to influence her watch also?"

"They wear their watches very near their hearts, I believe," said Courthope; "and even if the watch escapes the palpitation, the eyes which read the hour may see double."

"Well, you are no doubt an expert in these matters," said Whitaker. "So, then, let us assume that the lady's watch did go pit-a-pat; let us assume that at some time the deceased, either by his own hand or an agent's, did lock the two people in the tower. In that case, how comes it that Mr. Robert Courthope, some time after returning and refreshing himself at the Hall that night, hurried off to the vicarage to seek Warren, when he knew that he had imprisoned him in the tower, and could not have known of the chance by which a passing boy had released him? If it was he who had imprisoned

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Warren, or even if he had only known that Warren *was* a prisoner on the moor, he would hardly have gone to the vicarage to seek him, I think?"

At this, before answering, James Courthope weighed Inspector Webster of Scotland Yard deliberately, with a steady, calculating look. Then he said, "No; that seems true."

"Shall we assume, then," asked Whitaker, "that the Squire did *not* know that these two people were locked in the tower? That is to say, that he never did lock that tower-door upon them?"

"It would seem not," admitted Courthope, "though in that case I can't divine his motive for telling me that he had."

At this the room gave forth a murmur — as perturbing a sound in its way as any under heaven — because it tells a man who is lying that his lie is suspected.

"So you still take oath that the dead man did tell you this thing?" asked Mr. Whitaker.

"Still, yes, surely, since I have once said it," answered Courthope.

"But does no explanation of the miracle suggest itself to you?"

"I can only think that, in galloping off from the Hall to find Warren, Robert went first to the moor, and seeing Warren no longer on the tower, then went on to the vicarage."

At this the court breathed as it were a sigh of relief, for the tension had grown oppressive, and Hannah Neyland, with glee in her heart, breathed to herself, "What a man! He would find a way out of a prison of brass!"

By this time the short November afternoon had worn

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on toward evening, and the air of the room had become stale and stuffy. Some gas-jets, long since lit, gave forth too much heat, and men sat with the chin propped forth on the hand, waiting for the outcome. The reporters looked back over their crowded leaves; but when the groom, Archibald, had given his evidence, telling how he had watched the Greyhound for the Squire that night of the tower incident, how he had reported to the Squire Miss Marjorie Neyland's going to Lancault in the morning, and how the Squire had followed to Lancault, the court suddenly closed, the police demanding an adjournment, and Hudston streamed out into the street, breathing deeply the fresh air, its head all in a whirl at the maze of wonders which spurred, yet mocked, its wit to unravel.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LADY OF THE MANOR

MARJORIE NETLAND was glad enough of her sister's arm to support her in the passage from the inquest to the Greyhound. Her head so ached, her tortured thoughts were so overwhelming, that, as they paced through the crowd, Hudston gave Hannah its blessing for the sisterly loyalty which proved so staunch in spite of the stain now besmirching the fair fame of the younger girl.

Near the Greyhound arcade the sisters passed by James Courthope, who, standing there, as if awaiting some one, lifted his hat, and looked after them until they disappeared. Within stood Aunt Margaret, on the alert to receive Marjorie with hot tea, and kisses, and murmurs of "Never mind," and "He's never so black as he's painted."

Meantime the good old soul led Marjorie to her room, whereas her own father and mother stood severely aloof, with the agitated nether lip of lowered pride. Since the affair of the tower they had hardly been on speaking terms with her; though even they were awed and inclined to relent when, that evening, no less a person than the vicar called to see Marjorie.

She, lying half dressed on her bed, had to rise hurriedly,

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and went into his presence with her hand over her throbbing temples, at the sight of which the vicar bent sympathetically, saying:

"I did not know that you were so ailing, but I could no longer rest without coming to ask your forgiveness."

"For what, sir?" she asked, with the wistfulness of a wondering child.

"Well, on the night of the tower-mischief, I have to confess, I spoke of you in unwarrantable terms to my nephew. I had lately seen you under circumstances which rendered me unduly resentful, and I spoke of you in a light manner which wrung from Philip Warren's lips the word 'lie,' a word which I never thought to forgive while I drew my breath — for I am unfortunately of that nature — but which I now forgive, and admit that I deserved. And since I thus humble myself to you, you, too, will now pronounce my forgiveness, both on your own behalf and on his?"

"Freely, sir, on my behalf," said Marjorie.

"Which means on his, too, for I am sure that what you do is well done in his eyes. I am only grieved to see you looking wobegone."

"It is he, sir, who looks wobegone, if you but saw him! . . . Oh! was there ever such a fate to wring pity from a stone. . . . Forgive me . . . I can't help it."

"Yes, he has been hardly used. Yes, certainly, Philip Warren has been unfortunate, if ever man was. And in the pity of our hearts for him, you and I may find a sympathy, and henceforth be friends. Shall it not be so?"

"I hope so," said Marjorie, somewhat austere, standing white with her wan lids cast down, for it was borne

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in on her that people who mean well oft create untold evil by their strong-mindedness.

"Well, then, let it be so. But now, tell me this in confidence — have you any hope of hearing from him?"

"None! None!" she cried wildly.

"Why such a tone of despair? He may write you."

"Ah, never. You can't dream what a look was that last look which he cast at me. Ah, believe me, an everlasting parting was in that look, Mr. Isambard. . . ."

"But the unfathomable motive that could alone have actuated such conduct! If there was a duel — tell me, do you believe in your own heart that there was a duel?"

"Philip Warren, whatever he has done, did not murder Robert Courthope."

"Brave girl, bravely said," muttered Mr. Isambard. "Dark as it may seem, let us two, Marjorie, ever believe that there was a duel. But, given a duel, the mystery even deepens! The only possible cause of the duel must have been to decide which of the two should acquire possession of you. And Philip won this dreadful contest, for Robert Courthope lies in his library this night, making part of the dark society of the dead, and to-morrow will be borne whither he would not. And he did not commit suicide! Somehow he fell by Philip Warren's hand. But how does Philip, having won his battle, act? He leaves you, whom he has just won! repels you! leaves you, so you say, for ever. This is not the manner in which men act! Marjorie, there is something here too dark for our mortal eyes. . . ."

"Pity he ever ran away!" sobbed Marjorie, letting her arm drop with a weary despair. "People who run confess more than their actual guilt. Pity that he ever ran,

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pity that he ever saw me here, pity that I was ever born to be his bane!"

"Well, well," said the vicar soothingly, taking her listless hand in his, "we must not blame ourselves for these typhoons of events which seem to arise from nowhere to sweep before them all in their path. And I find gleams of hope here and there. Things have a way of unraveling themselves. Perhaps he may some day communicate with you. Promise me that, if he ever does, you will let me into the secret, and I, on my part, make you a like promise."

Marjorie murmured a "yes"; and thus sprang up an understanding between these two, who would never have found a common ground save under the cloud of calamity, and the vicar took an almost tender farewell of his new friend. Marjorie, on going out, found in the passage awaiting her both Aunt Margaret and Hannah, who during the last day or two had disputed between each other as to which should be the one to take most care of Marjorie.

They brought her to her room, urged her to lie down again, and sat by her, Aunt Margaret saying:

"Don't grieve so, honey. You shan't stop in this place, which is no fit place for you; more's the pity you ever came to it! My fault, all my fault! But make haste, get strong and hearty, and then you'll be back to London —"

"That she won't," broke in Hannah's strident voice. "You stay where you are, Marjorie, where you will have those that can and will look after you, and who will shower on you more than all you can ever ask for."

"Dear me!" cried Aunt Margaret, "we are coming to



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something now — ‘more than than all she can ever ask for.’ She knows, the darling, that I’m willing to give her my all, but the way you put it — ”

“Oh, I wasn’t talking of *you*,” said Hannah with disdain.

“Then, who in the world are you talking of?” asked the older woman.

“Who lives will see!” cried Hannah with a short laugh, leaping up smartly to look about the room.

Hannah was strange in those days. Her face wore a most wan mask, a sort of concentrated paleness, but also it wore a constant smile that had a kind of rictus or grin in it. She seemed to have grown taller! And she could not remain inactive three minutes together. It was necessary for Hannah to be up, to be on the move.

As to the notion of Marjorie going back to her studies, Hannah fought against it every time such a thing was mentioned. And never had sister more detestable motive than the secret inspiration of this sudden access of affection. Though there might be some satisfaction in writing to Marjorie in London, “I am now lady-of-the-manor of Hudston,” Hannah felt that she would be but half a lady, that her sunrise glow would lose half its flush, if the eyes of Marjorie were not there to behold, and the heart of Marjorie not there to envy. Hannah could appreciate, better than most, the feelings which led a Roman general to drag his hapless victims behind his triumphal car.

Since the death of the Squire she had been sleeping with Marjorie once more. Both one and the other needed company now in the dark nights, but Marjorie was far too worn to notice how restless was her elder sister.

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All the next forenoon after the opening of the inquest Hannah was hovering about Marjorie's bedside, dropping remarks which had in them something of the flippancy of a woman in a half-hysterical state. They were almost alone in the hotel, even Aunt Margaret having donned cape and bonnet to attend the funeral, to which the countryside was flocking on foot, on horse, and in every sort of vehicle.

Hannah, on a plea of feeling unwell, had remained at home with Marjorie. The rough weather of the last days had passed away. Through the curtains came a November sunshine like the light of a second summer, and down the street the church-bell sobbed after its dead.

"It is no use grieving about what's done," said Hannah, standing at a window, with her back to the bed. "Though he was a good sort, everybody says he wouldn't have lived long, seeing that he was drinking himself fast to death. We all know that, and a few months sooner or later make no difference."

Marjorie, lying with a handkerchief soaked in vinegar and eau de cologne pressed to her forehead, made no answer.

Hannah sighed, took a turn through the room, looked at herself in the mirror, took up and put down a pin-cushion, and returned to the window.

"There goes old John Clay and his wife in the trap," she said presently. "In a few minutes there will be hardly a soul left in the village."

Marjorie said nothing, and, in the silence, out psalmed again the soprano of a knell, prating of the grave.

"Well, one Squire Courthope is gone," continued Hannah, "gone and done with for good and all. But

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we must all go in our turn. The very day and hour are fixed long beforehand for each one, so it's no use anybody saying 'no' when his time comes, for what is to be will be."

Marjorie still made no reply. A little clock on the mantelpiece struck the hour. For an instant it seemed to startle the woman near the window, but she took up the parable.

"There goes twelve o'clock. They must just be going to 'lift' the body. Well, that's only what we all come to. . . . Marjorie, do you believe that Mr. Warren did it?"

"Did what?" asked Marjorie.

"Did he kill the Squire?"

Out tolled the funeral knell again, its tremolo lingering with a wild meaning of bereavement in the ear.

"Oh, please, don't!" came the murmur. "My head aches."

"Poor old Marjorie!" said Hannah, turning to hide a smile. "Never mind! You will stop in Hudston and stick to my side, and you shall have Mr. Warren yet, for I don't really believe the poor fellow is so black as he's painted."

At this Marjorie raised her head on her elbow, and, looking fixedly at her sister, said:

"This is the third or fourth time you have spoken in that way about 'sticking to your side.' Tell me what you mean, will you? What is it that you can do for me?"

Hannah giggled to herself, and looking down on the rings on her fingers said:

"Things are going to happen, Marjorie: I shan't be long as I am now, and when I am rich and great and powerful, I mean to take you under my protection, for I

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shall have you staying with me at the Hall, and I'll be showering all sorts of nice things on you."

Marjorie thought that over for a while. Then she said quietly:

"You shouldn't be a foolish dreamer, dear."

"Foolish dreamer, is it?" said Hannah, with a laugh: "you see that sun shining there? What I tell you is just as sure as that that sun will set to-night."

"What, has Mr. James Courthope promised to marry you?" asked Marjorie.

"He has," and Hannah turned sharply round, drawing herself up, with a superb, calm smile, her chin in the air.

"When?"

"Oh, long ago."

"But — haven't I told you? I don't think that this man is honest and true. Whatever promises he may have made you when he was poor, you are not to build any castles on them —"

"And why not, pray?"

"Must I tell you? Well, then, if I must — because he has pestered *me* several times with his attentions, has lain in wait for me, has declared himself enamored —"

"He was only playing with you, my girl," and Hannah smiled again calmly.

"I *hope* so, for your sake. But wasn't even such play rather disloyal to you?"

"Oh, men are all like that. He was only having a little game with a pretty girl like you. I don't mind so long as he never kissed you. Did he ever?"

"You are joking."

"Ah, but that's not answering the question, though!"

"Do you, then, hold me so cheap? Don't be absurd."

### *Three Men and a Maid*

But, as you say, his advances to me may have been without much meaning, and if this good fortune is really to happen to you, I, of course, shall rejoice with you. Only do be careful — ”

“It’s sure,” said Hannah, smiling serenely.

“Why so sure?”

“It’s a case of has to be, you see. You can’t get over ‘has to,’ can you?”

“Won’t you explain yourself?”

Hannah burst into a laugh, and tripped out of the room, humming a lively air, and from the village end the church-bell knelled after her.

The next forenoon the inquest was resumed, again with the same crush in the schoolroom. Hannah had to be there, but Marjorie, having neither will nor power, remained at home, though she had risen from bed, and during the inquest was sitting at the drawing-room window, her eyes fixed on a book of which she did not read a word. Her hair and forehead were just visible to any one looking from the opposite side of the street. The village folk were all in or near the schoolroom, and the main street was a dead place. The hotel, too, was lonely, her father and mother being at the inquest. Aunt Margaret had gone with them, curiosity conquering reticence and shyness.

Suddenly some instinct caused Marjorie to lift her eyes, and there below in the street she saw a man gazing at her fixedly. He raised his hat as his glance met hers. It was James Courthope, who, knowing that she was alone, had stolen out of the court in the hope of holding some talk with her.

In Courthope’s looks was no little agitation — the looks

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of a man engaged on an adventure in which his heart and passions are genuinely concerned, and the moment Marjorie's head slightly inclined itself in answer to his salute, Courthope seemed to take his resolution into both hands, hurried across the street, and entered the Greyhound, to come to her.

In these days, of course, Courthope was still fresh from his sudden exaltation, being heir-at-law to the dead man, so that, as lord of all he surveyed, including Marjorie, his steps were light, and his head was no doubt somewhat intoxicated. As for the girl, at his first movement to dart into the house, she sprang to her feet, pale with anger, murmuring to herself:

"If he only dares —!"

But James Courthope was daring, and in a minute he was within the drawing-room door, with ready and smiling ease. They looked at each other, while all the woman in Marjorie read into the man's heart. . . .

But before one word was spoken, a third person was with them. Hannah had noticed Courthope's going out from the court, had wondered, followed, spied; hot on his trail, with the thievish swift feet of a jaguar, came Hannah!

The situation was tense: Hannah stood blanched, fists clenched, while Marjorie had a guilty feeling of being caught and compromised, and could not repress a blush which Hannah noticed. But James Courthope was at once himself, and smiled, saying:

"Ah, Hannah? You here, too? I want to see Mrs. Richards (meaning Aunt Margaret) to ask her some questions about that evening before the tragedy. Is she in?"

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"No," answered Marjorie, "she has unfortunately missed the honor of your visit."

"Not irretrievably," he said. "I always try again."

"I thought it would be Aunt Margaret you wanted," remarked Hannah in a strained voice. "I came to get some water. . . ."

Hannah and Courthope then turned and went down the stair together and out into the street, Courthope feeling like a prisoner and detected thief, and for a time no word was uttered between them, till Hannah asked casually:

"What could you have wanted to see Marjorie about?"

"What do you think?" grumbled Courthope, sullenly; and nothing more was said.

They went back into the court, but Hannah only for two minutes! At the end of that time she was again outside the schoolroom side door, standing there with her father and mother in conference, and in a low voice of passion she murmured:

"Which is it to be — Marjorie or me? We can't both live in the same house!"

"Why, what's up now?" asked Jonas, gazing helplessly, first at his wife, then at his eldest daughter.

"Choose quick between us!" hissed Hannah, peremptorily: "a disgraced thing like her — found on the top of a tower at midnight with a man who commits murder — my good name is at stake, I don't sleep under the same roof with her two more nights —"

"Well, I'm danged!" protested the unhappy Jonas, "you must be all mad together. What harm has the lass done you all of a sudden now?"

"I've just made up my mind to it," said Hannah, "and

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nothing is going to move me, so it's useless arguing the point. Is it she or me? I've got a few pounds laid by, and if she doesn't go, *I* go, so you know."

"Don't you dare speak so to your father, Hannah. For shame on you!" cried Mrs. Neyland. "What a flaming tantrum you've worked yourself into, to be sure! And nobody knows where to take ye — yesterday you was arguing and praying for your sister to stay, and not to go to London, and now hark at you —! People should learn to know their own minds, I think."

"Oh, stop it!" muttered Hannah. "I've told you what I've got to say, and that's enough."

So the talk went on for a while, the innkeeper at first refusing to turn his child out of doors and Mrs. Neyland making a struggle on behalf of the daughter of whom she was so proud. But when it became certain that Hannah was in the deadliest earnest, Martha and Jonas exchanged glances which meant that they could not afford to let Hannah carry out her threat. They knew full well that that "business" depended on her, and they were equally aware that Marjorie had, in some indefinable way, passed out of their lives. Later in the afternoon a family council took place, at which such things were said by the infuriated Hannah as caused Aunt Margaret to approach Marjorie toward evening with the words: "Now, dearie, you'll be thinking of going back to London soon, an' you can depend on me to make it easy for you."

Marjorie sobbed her utter indifference, London or Hudston being all one to her, since, in her then low state of mind and health, she had little faith in her own powers of unraveling the mysteries that surrounded her, even if she stayed on at Hudston.



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"Yes, I think you'd better, dearie," said Aunt Margaret, "if only for a time, till things blow over; your father and Hannah aren't too over-glad of your company just for the present, it looks like, and you've only got your mother and me, poor dear. So unless you're waiting for the result of the inquest —"

"Ah, I know what the result will be," answered Marjorie, wearily.

"Then, don't stay another day where you're not wanted," said Aunt Margaret with a proud head; and an hour later Marjorie was packing to go by the next morning's 9.15 train, with Hannah helping her.

Hannah, who seemed to have recovered a certain gruff good humor, said not a word as to James Courthope's secret visit to the hotel, and all that evening was full of talk, telling Marjorie how things had gone at the inquest, which again stood adjourned — how it began to look more and more true that Mr. Warren had assassinated the Squire, since witness after witness from the Hall had been examined to see whether anybody had noticed the Squire going out with a sword on the evening of his death, but no one had seen him; and then how Mr. Hardinge, Warren's lawyer, had tried to get some of the Hall retainers to say that one of the Squire's swords was missing from the rack, but none of them could remember exactly how many swords the Squire possessed. That, too, had broken down, and now people were guessing that when the Squire went to Lancault in the morning, on hearing from Archibald, the groom, that Marjorie was there with Mr. Warren, he must have had a talk with Mr. Warren, must have made an appointment to come back in the evening to discuss matters finally, and Mr. Warren,

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knowing that he was to return, had made up his mind to kill him. So he sent to the vicarage for his sword, and when the Squire appeared had stabbed him. But there were a lot of people in the village, though not the majority, who swore that Mr. Warren never would have done such a thing, and some of the young men looked like coming to blows over it. The only other witness that afternoon was Felix, who had been questioned as to the "little short gentleman" who had sent him to ask Marjorie from Mr. Warren whether she would be going to the tower that evening. Felix, after saying that he did not know who the little short gentleman was, set the whole court in a roar of laughter by pointing to little Mr. Bennett and saying: "P'raps that chap mun be he; he lukes summat like him," which made Mr. Bennett look foolish, and you would have thought Mr. Courthope would have had a fit, he laughed so when he saw Mr. Bennett's face.

Such was Hannah's report, first at the bedside, and again when lights were out, and she was in her own bed, which had been brought into Marjorie's large room.

Marjorie listened, but said little. Her sister's vagaries of temper left her unmoved. Presently Hannah's murmurings about the day's history died away, and she was asleep; being quite worn out by the strain under which she had lived during the past week.

Marjorie could not sleep; she heard midnight strike from the church and in the house, then one o'clock; the moon which had fitfully lit the duel, now on the wane, had set, and in the darkness of her chamber Marjorie's tired eyes seemed to see in outlines of pale light a countenance of sorrow. She turned many times on her bed,

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warily, so as not to wake Hannah, trying to compose herself to sleep, but without result; and she heard two strike.

It was soon after this that the horror of the tragedy overcame her anew. She thought of Philip eating his heart out, of Robert Courthope lying in the cold vault of his race, and her sorrow melted into tears. To dry her eyes she felt under her pillow, where she thought that her handkerchief was, but failed to find it.

A handkerchief, however, was necessary, so she rose quietly, and stole away to her dress hung on a peg of a rack. The chamber was spacious, and the darkness pretty dense, but knowing exactly where her dress hung, she went straight to it. However, on feeling in the pocket, she found no handkerchief, so she next moved to the dressing-table to get some matches. In groping her hand struck against a silver powder-box, which fell with some clatter, but the next moment she had found the matches, lit one, and peered about under its fitful gleam for a handkerchief. She could see none anywhere, but quite near her, over a chair back, hung Hannah's dress, so she put her hand into the pocket of this to get Hannah's handkerchief.

By this time the match had burnt out, and she drew out the handkerchief in the dark. Hearing that something else had come out with it, and had dropped to the floor, she struck another match to find and to put back into the pocket whatever had slipped out. At the instant when this second match was alight she had the consciousness that Hannah was awake, that Hannah had started out of her bed and was darting toward her. Simultaneously, Marjorie's eye fell upon what had dropped. It was an envelope, and in that one moment it was as though her

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eyes acquired a triple power and quickness of vision, for before Hannah could even reach her, Marjorie had seen two things — a round spot like red ink or blood, with a spattered edge, on the paper, and also she had seen that the envelope was directed to "The County Coroner" in the long sprawling handwriting which she knew to be that of the dead Squire.

And since all this was naturally astonishing and interesting to her, Marjorie swooped and had the envelope in her hand a second before Hannah could rush upon her. Then the second match went out.

"Quick — give me that — you thief!" shrieked Hannah, wrenching furiously at Marjorie's wrist which she had managed to seize.

"Why, what is it?" asked Marjorie; "are you mad?"

"Give me that thing! Quick!"

"Which thing? You are hurting me!"

"I'll show you, you thief —!"

"Oh, Hannah, don't!"

"Will you give it up, you beast?"

"Give what up? I shall scream —!"

"Quick, let go! or I'll break your fingers."

"Hannah! — Shame! — I shall faint —!"

"Then, will you give it up?"

"Give what? Never! Never!"

Thus the frenzied exclamations mingled together, and the struggle went tumbling half over the chamber, upsetting chairs, setting dogs barking, casting about ornaments on the dressing-table, while the furniture seemed to have suddenly multiplied itself a hundred fold in the dark, and every moment some new object started up for them to tumble over.

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Marjorie, however, being weak from suffering and want of food, and Hannah being a powerful girl, the struggle had not lasted long when Marjorie relaxed her bitten lip to sigh her sense of failure, feeling her sore fingers giving way to the grip that tugged at them. Yet she did not yield, and just then, falling down against a settee which hurt her back, she gave out a scream which seemed to have the effect of paralyzing Hannah a little, and a moment later the door flew open, they were blinded with light, and there stood their father and mother, Aunt Margaret and two servant-maids, all with lights, staring at Marjorie half on the settee and half on the floor, with Hannah, in a rent night-dress, astalk over her.

Old Jonas's jaw fell, as he stared at them, for never had the Greyhound witnessed such a scene, and Aunt Margaret, after her first shock of astonishment, flew at the pair, and with her wiry arms soon had Hannah torn away, while Marjorie cast herself over the bed, with sobs in her throat and tears in her eyes, and — the envelope in her hand.

"She has something of mine! Tell her to give it up!" screamed Hannah out of the midst of the press who were forcing her out of the room. But no one heeded her; peace at any price was the first need, so she was soon hustled out, and Marjorie was left alone with her aunt, who refused to go back to her room.

"What can be the matter! What a scene in the middle of the night between two sisters!" cried the old lady, shaking her head up and down.

For a long time Marjorie was in too much agitation to give any explanation. Finally, after an hour, she got Aunt Margaret back to her own bed with only a vague

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impression that a piece of paper was the cause of all the dark rumpus.

Then, when she was alone, Marjorie locked her door upon herself, and she went to her dressing-table and smoothed out the mauled envelope under the lamp.

Again now she looked at the red spot upon it, and thought it was hardly ink, but blood, and there, beyond doubt in the dead man's writing, she read the address: "To the County Coroner."

But something was inside the envelope. She took it out — half a sheet of note-paper — expecting with assurance to see Robert Courthope's writing on that, too. To her amazement the writing was Warren's!

She read the words: "If I be found dead, be it understood that I have neither destroyed myself, nor been murdered, but fell in fair and equal duello with a gentleman whom I have as earnestly sought to wound as he to wound me. God assoilzie my soul. Amen. Philip Warren."

The first effect of these words upon Marjorie was to cause her to drop to her knees with her arms cast up, while a sob of "thank heaven!" welled up from her heart. There had been a duel, then! Here, it seemed to her, was proof for the whole world. . . .

Then, after this first ecstasy, she sat on the edge of her bed for a long time, though it was cold, with her chin on her hand, and if ever mortal was wholly lost and confounded in perplexities without end it was that aching brain now. There had been a duel! for her lover had said it; though it would have been better in the eyes of the world if it had been the Squire who had said it — far better that the vanquished should excuse the victor, than that the victor should excuse himself! Still, there had

### *Three Men and a Maid*

been a duel! and then — what? The victor, having won her, had — left her for ever! had warned her awfully with his eye! That was strange; that was passing pitiful! And Warren's letter in Courthope's envelope! that was an added puzzle. How had Hannah come by it? Why had she sought so desperately to conceal it . . . ?

Toward morning Marjorie's head dropped of itself on her pillow, and she fell into a sleep.

She was roused by a loud knocking at her door about eight in the morning, and in came Aunt Margaret bustling, astonished that Marjorie was not making the last preparations for the departure for London in an hour's time.

"My poor child," she said, "you'll have to bolt your breakfast, if you're to catch the 9.15 —"

"I am not going, aunt," said Marjorie, calmly.

"What, not to-day?"

"No. Not perhaps for many a day."

'Well — but — Marjorie, darling — your father and mother —'

"They must put up with me, and learn to be happy at their daughter's presence."

"So they are — so they are, I'm sure. But — still — Marjorie — the point is about Hannah. After what has happened between you, she'll only go away, if you don't, for she vows that she will, and I misdoubt if they can do without her in the house —"

"Still, I shall stay," said Marjorie, quietly, "and Hannah will stay, too. Hannah, it seems to me, will have to learn to do as I wish. When is the next day for the inquest?"

"To-day, dearie."

"All right — we shall see. I'll dress now."

## CHAPTER IX

### INSPECTOR WEBSTER

SUDDENLY, as Marjorie dressed that morning, a thought from nowhere leaped up in her mind.

"Suppose Philip hasn't done any wrong, after all! Suppose he not only did not kill Robert Courthope, but is wholly guiltless, and is merely the victim of some entangled doom whose nature no brain can dream!"

It seemed wild enough, but out of the dark depths of the heart hope was born in her, bringing a light to her eyes, a little flush to her cheeks once more.

She dressed in a hurry, yet hardly knew whither she was going, feeling only that it was necessary to consult some one, to do something. When she ran down the stairs to eat the first meal she had tasted since she last saw her lover, her intention was to go to the vicar, but she went instead to the small inn down the street near the church, where Inspector Webster was staying. She knew that he was officially her enemy, the hound of the law let loose to track Philip Warren; but she had noticed his face during the first day of the inquest, and had thought well of it. She sent up her name.

Webster was still a young man of thirty-five, plump, bullet-headed, bullet-eyed, with an actor's mouth and a



### *Three Men and a Maid*

trim mustache which he ever nibbled when he was not smoking.

"I am glad to see you," he said, as Marjorie stood before him, "I wanted to have a talk with you. Please take a chair," and Marjorie felt at once, in his personality, in his hard, quiet smile, a sense of power which pleased her.

"I'm afraid I am rather early —" she began.

"Never a bit, Miss Neyland," said he; "never too early to do good, for I can see you have something good to tell me."

For answer, Marjorie handed him the red-spotted envelope, marked "To the County Coroner," with its enclosure. She expected to see him look startled, but his eye steadily twinkled upon it, though he now took up again the cigar which he had put down, and, going to a window, fumigated the envelope and letter with vehement puffs, while he studied them, his back turned to the room. That was Webster's way — with him it was a case of no smoke, no thought. But within three minutes he had turned round with a laugh in his eyes, and put down the envelope and the cigar again, saying:

"So you had a fight to get it, Miss Neyland?"

"Yes," answered Marjorie.

"Got it from your sister?"

"How can you — know?"

"I don't know, but should like to. You tell me everything straight out, and you may find that that will be the best in the end."

"I mean to."

"Good."

Then she told him — of the dropping of the envelope from Hannah's pocket — of the struggle in the dark.

## *Inspector Webster*

"It must have been a sight worth seeing," he remarked. "I should have bet on you, and I should have won."

"But how could my sister possibly come by this thing?" she asked.

"Nothing more simple," he answered, as though the affair were an excellent joke. "You will find, when she comes to explain it in the court this afternoon, that she was wandering about Lancault, say the day after the tragedy, and picked up this note somewhere in the thick of the bracken. Wait and see if that doesn't turn out to be the explanation."

"Well, I suppose that something of the sort may be true. But why did she hide it?"

"Simple, simple," said Webster, his chin between his finger and thumb, his eyes fixed quizzingly on Marjorie's face. "She didn't wish it to be known that any morbid craving had been causing her to wander about a spot which everybody in the village is shunning. You'll find that that's it, I'm certain."

"No, no. There must be some other motive, or she would at least have mentioned it to *me*, to some one, in confidence."

"No, the same motive with regard to you as to anybody else — sheer diffidence. She said to herself: 'I don't want to be mixed up in all this row any more than I am already. I've found this thing, but I'll keep it to myself.'"

"Are you serious?" asked Marjorie. "My sister is not usually so reticent! And could any such paltry half-motive keep her from revealing the proofs of another human creature's innocence?"

"Proofs? Innocence?" asked the Inspector with a fine assumption of wonder. "Innocence of what?"

### *Three Men and a Maid*

"Of murder at least? Deosn't this thing prove that there was a duel?"

"If one man kills another in a duel, isn't that murder? Not a very ugly murder, perhaps, but still murder — in England. And why do you suppose that this letter and envelope constitute a proof that there was a duel? They don't."

"They do — to me."

"To you, no doubt. Others may be harder to convince. Suppose that Warren did assassinate the Squire, what was to prevent him, after the deed, from scribbling in pencil that there had been a duel, then enclosing it in an envelope out of the dead man's pocket?"

"But what marvelous luck to find in the dead man's pocket an envelope in his own handwriting!" said Marjorie, "and an envelope directed to, of all appropriate people, 'The County Coroner'!"

"Queer, isn't it?" said the Inspector, smiling.

"It couldn't have happened!" she cried.

"Well, what do you think did happen?" he asked, with a quick side-look at her.

"I believe that before the duel Mr. Warren wrote the declaration, and then the Squire put it into an envelope and wrote the address on it as a kind of confirmation of Mr. Warren's statement —"

The Inspector chuckled.

"Do you think that the Squire carried about blank envelopes in his pocket? And where did he get *the ink* in Lancault Church —"

"A fountain-pen —"

"Where is the pen? Warren would have had no more motive for taking it away than he had for taking away the

## *Inspector Webster*

Squire's sword — if there had been a pen and a sword. On the contrary, he had a motive to leave them, to show that there had been a duel. But there was no pen, and no sword. So, you see, there was no duel. What have you got to say to that, now?"

"There was *one* sword at least," said Marjorie, "and that one is as strong a disproof of assassination as two would have been a proof of a duel. For, if Mr. Warren were an assassin, why leave that one sword, which could be identified as his, stuck in the body? Why not take it away with him? or — bury it?"

"Shrewd question," said Inspector Webster, who smiled again delightedly. "I see you really believe that there was a duel."

Marjorie made no answer, not from displeasure at his bantering tone, but because she was lost in thought. Though the detective argued against her, and seemed to treat her opinions with the irony of a father toward a precocious child, she had a half feeling of some mine of meaning at the back of his brain, which, if she but knew it, might yet prove to be not against, but for her.

At any rate, Inspector Webster did not mean to give her time to think, as he went on blandly:

"We must never be too sure of anything. It is only you and a few prejudiced people who still seem to cling to the idea of a duel. There is the question of that ring, for instance. You seemed to try to suggest in your evidence that the absence of the ring and the scratch on Warren's hand may have had the same origin, namely, the stroke of a rapier, and that the absence of the ring meant a duel. Quite so — but in that case we should expect to find the ring on the spot, since Warren, by your

### *Three Men and a Maid*

suggestion, was in too great flurry of mind to search for and pick it up. But it isn't there. No ring — no sword — no pen."

"I am now fairly certain that the ring *is* there," said Marjorie. "I have a sure feeling that the loss of it was the cause of at least part of his distress when I saw him running away, and, if so, it should be there still among the grass in the church —"

"It isn't, though," said the Inspector. "Every tuft of grass in that church, every square inch of it, has been examined under the lens —"

"It may have fallen into a hole between the slabs."

"If only there were any holes — but there are none."

"I should say that it is there," was her stubborn answer. "Men cannot find lost things. I mean to give a year of my life, if necessary, to seeking that ring, starting from to-day."

"A year is a long while," said the Inspector; "but it was about this ring that I was thinking of paying you a visit. I shall be obliged if you will describe it to me."

Marjorie sketched for him a picture of the signet of old Thomas de Warrenne — the dragon's head on its helm, and explained the meaning of "gules," of "chevron arg."

"Thank you," said Mr. Webster, "some day perhaps I may come across it."

"Ah, if it only could be found, and given to him! I believe that it would re-inspire him with hope and spirit, and that might make everything different — perhaps he would come out of his hiding, explain his innocence . . .!"

"You seem very sure that he has an innocence to explain!" commented the detective, smiling ever.

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"Yes, sure! And every hour more sure. O, Inspector Webster, believe in me! It is as I say!"

"Sh-h-h! Don't lift your voice." He opened the door rapidly, and closed it softly again. "You are a queer young lady to speak like that to me! When you say 'innocent,' what do you mean? That you think he didn't fight, or what?"

"Kill, I mean, kill! Mr. Robert Courthope *died by some other hand* —!"

"*Sh-h-h!* — for goodness' sake! You must not harbor such surmises without the least grounds. May I ask if you have happened to mention these unfounded suspicions to any one?"

"No, for I have only had them this morning since I found the envelope and note —"

"Only this morning, you see. They can hardly be worth a great deal, can they?"

"Ah, they *may*! We shall see. I haven't begun to think yet, but I mean to!"

Inspector Webster took two turns through the room, without making any answer. Then, with a very grave face and quite a change of tone, he said: "I heard that you were going to London, Miss Neyland. Isn't that the case?"

"Yes. How on earth —?"

"It is my business to know things, you know. But aren't you going still?"

"No, I shall stay."

"Well — more's the pity," said he, half aloud.

"Pity? But why?" asked Marjorie.

"Did I say 'pity'? I mean that this is such a dead-and-alive little place for a lady like yourself, accustomed

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to London life. And suppose I add that it may possibly prove beneficial to the interests you have at heart if you got clear away out of here — will you go then?"

"No. Not unless you will be so good as to explain yourself. I am staying here for that very reason, in order to see if, sooner or later, by luck or wit, I may not be able to do something for the protection of the man I love."

"But what *can* you ever do?" The emphasis was gentle, but genuine. "Why not leave it to those who know their way about better than you, who, if there's anything to be done, will do it? I can see that you are rather too sharp for this business — too sharp, and not sharp enough — and that is a combination only too likely to work mischief."

"Unfortunately, I don't understand you," retorted Marjorie, watching him closely. "I am not going to work any mischief, I am going to work good."

"Well — have it your own way, Miss Neyland. But, at least, listen to this. Supposing these far-fetched notions of yours do have any grounds — I say supposing — do you understand well that it will be better never to breathe one word of them to a living soul — except me? It is easy to see, isn't it, that you might only succeed in putting others on their guard?"

"I see! That is why you want me to go away!" she cried. "I see — I am too sharp, and not sharp enough, having a woman's head. Still, you may be certain, Inspector Webster, that I shall not fail to follow your hint as to secrecy; and, am I to take it, then, that *you*, too, harbor these same far-fetched suspicions of mine, since you are so anxious for my silence?"

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"Never a bit — pooh! Never a bit!" He reached for his cigar again.

"I believe that you do, really, but you won't take me into partnership, though it has happened that the stone which the builders rejected became in the end the head of the corner. However, I am delighted to imagine you secretly on my side, and mean to run you a friendly race to the goal."

Steadily during the interview Marjorie's spirits had heightened, hence this challenge, which the Inspector heard like "the idle wind." She rose, saying: "I only want now to ask you whether the police have any hope of capturing Philip Warren soon? Nothing ought to be easier, considering his characteristic appearance, his abundant wavy hair, his velvet jacket, his Cavalier face, his splendid figure, and striking profile."

"I know it all," said Webster, smiling upon her.

"Will you catch him soon?"

"So I am to give you the secrets of the authorities, Miss Neyland?"

"Keep your secrets," said she. "I only hope that he will be caught, and that it will be you who do it, for I believe in you. But you had better be quick, or I will beat you."

With this jest, Marjorie walked out, leaving the envelope and note with the Inspector, who, on her departure, went to peep after her from behind a window curtain, and watched the poetry of her motion down the street with the murmur of "I am beginning to understand that fight!" while she, on arriving at the Greyhound, shut herself away in her part of the house, to avoid an encounter with Hannah or the others, until she knew that the inquest had begun.



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In her room alone she knit her brows to the problems of the event which had so suddenly overshadowed her life, though her thoughts were somewhat distracted by her waiting for the verdict of the coroner's jury. She hoped now that, with that note of Philip's, endorsed by the Squire's writing, and with all the fresh doubts that this must rouse, no twelve men in Hudston would dare to utter those terrible words, "wilful murder."

But the waiting was painfully long.

All the afternoon the schoolroom continued pregnant with its big conference, till, toward evening, unable any more to sit still, Marjorie sallied out into the empty village to go to Lancault, to give effect to her notion of searching for the signet-ring.

When she had climbed over the slab into the little church, her heart all at once failed her when she thought of her promise to search there for a year. A week might have been better, since human patience has its limits. For she saw at a glance that the ring could not be in the church itself, all the grass having been removed, and the floor quite integral. However, like every character of any worth, she had a stout belief in her own powers and luck, and she set herself the large task of searching the surrounding bracken, bit by bit, day by day, in a methodical way, till hope should merge into despair in her heart.

There and then she began the work. But, in the midst of it, the gloom of evening dropped down upon her; in there in the church there were blood-stains on the stones; and all at once panic seized her, and she could stay not another moment in the place, but hurried away with more than one backward look.

She reached home just in time before the schoolroom

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poured forth its throng, and was taking off her hat when Aunt Margaret bustled into the room with an awed whisper of "the vicar!"

Mr. Isambard had come himself to give to Marjorie the day's news. With a strained note in his voice, he told her how Mr. Hardinge had made a speech that would establish his reputation, holding up each of the threads of the case before the jury's eyes, to demonstrate that Warren might, after all, have taken the Squire's life in sheer self-defense; how he had converted half Hudston to his view; and how Marjorie's sister had been so heckled that at one time she had shown signs of fainting.

"Was that when they were asking her about the envelope and note?" asked Marjorie.

"No; when she was being cross-examined as to her summons to the Hall on the afternoon of the tragedy," answered Mr. Isambard. "It was thought extraordinary that the Squire should have chosen her as the witness of a document, when there were no end of witnesses ready to hand about him, and when the document was apparently not one of any importance to any one connected with Hannah."

"And what was the nature of the document, sir?"

"A mere assignment of some pasture-lands — Mr. Bennett, of Nutworth, produced it in court. He said that the Squire expressed a wish to have Hannah as a witness, he did not know why. So Hannah was sent for, and duly signed the instrument."

"I noticed her go out during the afternoon that day," said Marjorie. "She did not mention to me why. But I don't see anything in that to cause her to faint."

"Well, the poor girl was persistently heckled by both

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lawyers," said the vicar, "not only as to that, but as to her finding of the envelope and note, as to her reasons for concealing them, as to her whereabouts on the evening of the tragedy, and other matters. All this did not seem very pertinent to the case, and the village-folk felt that she was being brow-beaten. However, she won through, and, as she stood down, Mr. Whitaker, for the police, first spoke, and then Hardinge, leaving between them upon the mind an impression that all the wonder-workers of time and space had a hand in that business that night! How, asked Mr. Hardinge, explain the fact that the dead man was without his coat, except on the theory of a duel? The culprit, said Whitaker, might have taken it off after the death to give an impression of a duel. But would he have taken all that pains, said Hardinge, and yet leave his sword sticking in the dead man's breast, seeing that the sword was not fixed into any bone, but came away easily, as P. C. Bates had deposed? But, retorted Whitaker, the mere fact of the sword left in the breast was a disproof of a duel, seeing that, in a duel, the victor does not, of course, part with his weapon on delivering the stab. But, then, asked Hardinge, how account for the three additional flesh-wounds, mere pricks, on the deceased, except on the theory of a duel? Or for the wound on Warren's hand, deposed to by Miss Neyland? Or for the blood-stained handkerchief of the Squire, used to wipe a small-sword — certainly not the small-sword found in the Squire, but some other? How, above all, account for the fact that Warren's note, declaring a duel, was found in the Squire's envelope directed to the County Coroner? So the two lawyers bandied the ball between them with no little nimbleness of wit, but all the time

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working worse confusion, while I remarked that Inspector Webster's face was the image of quiet amusement at the battle of brains taking place before him."

"But the verdict, sir — you keep that from me," said Marjorie.

"Does it really matter? It was what it had to be," said Mr. Isambard, gently. "The coroner told the jury that the question whether there had been a duel or no was, he feared, one far beyond their wit to decide. Moreover, it had nothing to do with the question whether or no Robert Courthope was wilfully murdered. And the jury, after a short talk, gave their verdict — accordingly."

This Marjorie in her heart must have expected, yet it fell upon her as such a shock, that she sat in a stony silence, seeing a vision of that ever-joyous face of Philip Warren, which one week before had moved in sunshine before her imagination like Apollo, and now was banished, branded, all overwhelmed in cloud and darkness. She was on her way to her rooms to hide her tears when she was met by her mother, who, hurrying along with hat and cloak still on, said to her:

"Marjorie, your sister is very bad, we've just put her to bed."

Pulling herself together at once, the girl turned to go to Hannah, whom she had not seen since the tussle for the envelope.

Either from the mauling through which she had passed that day at the hands of the lawyers, or from some reaction after her high-strung state of the last few days, the verdict being now pronounced, Hannah was really ill, and lay flushed and turgid, with her face turned away to the wall, and a resentful tightening of her lips.

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"Hannah," said Marjorie, bending over her, "I am sorry to see you unwell. I have come to help to nurse you."

Hannah glared fixedly at the wall, and made no answer.

"You must see for yourself that I had to do what I did," whispered Marjorie, "with regard to showing what I found in your dress. So there's no reason why you should keep up the quarrel."

"Oh, my head!" wailed Hannah, clapping her hand to her eyes and forehead, and at the same moment Dr. Lawrence came in.

Marjorie remained in the room until she was no longer able to sustain her own headache. She passed most of the next day, too, by the sick-bed. But Hannah, though now better, absolutely rejected her, would not speak a word. Marjorie, however, was stubborn, too, and kept up the siege of kindness till near five o'clock, when she set off afresh upon her self-imposed task of seeking the ring.

It was then growing dusk, and again the ghostly qualms which had beset her the previous evening disturbed her nerves, and she had, too, a new feeling of the hopelessness of the whole undertaking, for projects, warm in their first blush, tend to lose their rose-color in the actuality of being carried out. However, there was no question of failing to be true to herself, and she went on; but in passing over the bridge, for the first time the thought of having some help in her search occurred to her at the sight of Felix at the foot of the hill on the other side of the river. Felix was in trouble. At the farther end of the bridge was a heap of stones for road-mending, and from this arsenal three small boys were pelting him where he stood twenty yards away, up the hill. As Marjorie came near, one was shouting:

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"It's as much ours as thine!"

Another sent a stone with the cry: "That's for not playin' fair!"

Felix stood without flight, without protest, but with his elbow before his crying eyes. Marjorie, however, rescued him, putting herself between him and his foes, and at the same time had the thought of taking Felix to Lancault. This poor simpleton at least would give her human company.

"You come with me," she said, "I have a job for you, don't cry" — and the two went on up the hill together, Marjorie asking: "Why were the boys pelting you?"

"Because they be naughty boys," whined Felix, mournfully. "They be always peltin' me wi' stones, an' they weän't play wi' me."

"Girls are nicer," said Marjorie, "why don't you play with girls?"

"Girls weän't hev me at any price," sobbed Felix, with his arm over his eyes.

"Poor Felix! — despised and rejected of men. You are not the only one. Never mind, *I'll* have you, for, look you, about half an hour earlier than this each day I am going to Lancault to hunt over the enclosure for something — a ring — which has been lost there, and I mean to take you with me, and pay you so much a week. Is that nice? Are you glad?"

But Felix, who had a distinctive dislike for anything in the nature of work and wages, exhibited no delight. He was kept alive by some tiny fund of money somewhere, and was the freest soul in the world, blessed with the life of a bird.

"I dussent go te Lancault, I doän't think," he answered at last.

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"But why not?" asked Marjorie.

"T' boys say folk munnot gan there any more" — these being the only lords whom the free heart of Felix owned, "the boys."

"Boys, indeed!" cried Marjorie. "Would you rather do what the boys tell you, or what *I* tell you?"

"I'd sooner deä what t' boys telt me," confessed Felix, with the perfection of frankness.

"You unexpected person!" she said with a little laugh. "I won't hear of such nonsense. I shall give you five shillings a week, and you will soon begin to like that when you get it. So you must come."

"I'd rayther not," faltered Felix, "I doän't mind yance in a way, when they aren't lookin' —"

"Nonsense, you must, and I shall make it quite right with the boys for you."

Felix pondered it, and said again! "I'd rayther not. What be it you'll be lookin' for yonder?"

"A ring."

"Won't my ring deä as well? Ye can hae't an' welcome, on'y doän't let t' boys be any the wiser."

Marjorie looked at him in astonishment, saying: "How did you come by a ring?"

"Those three boys down there say that I got it at Lancault, and that's why —"

Marjorie stood still, staring at him, breathing in little gasps, and suddenly pale, unable to speak for the whirlwind of surmise that reeled through her mind, while Felix said again:

"Ye can hae't, an' welcome, on'y I wouldn't give it to t' boys, 'cause they didn't ask me civil for it."

As he spoke, a ring had come slowly out of the depths

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of his trouser-pocket, and lay on his palm, while Marjorie stood spellbound, half-laughing, half-crying, alternately pale and flushing, gazing with fascinated eyes at the ring which she had promised to spend a year in seeking. There it lay in the idiot's hand, looking quite whole and sound, though, in fact, the gold was cracked across under the stone; and at last, the spell breaking which held Marjorie a statue, she was gone with the ring, running down the hill, calling back at Felix, "I'll see you again soon!"

Her first impulse led her to flaunt with triumph her treasure-trove before the eyes of Inspector Webster. For the ring found seemed to mean the certainty of a duel, and, that established, many things might begin to take different proportions, assume different colors! The Inspector had bid her be gone to London, trusting in his own self-sufficiency, looking upon her as only a danger there, yet, already, she had done something. What all his care and wit had failed in, her luck had accomplished; so, in her high spirits and friendly rivalry with him, she hastened eagerly to the inn, meaning to ask him as a first question if he still thought that it would be well for her to make herself small in Hudston.

But all this crowing in advance was extinguished at the inn-door, by the news that Inspector Webster was not there. He had left Hudston an hour before for Nutworth. He would be returning, he had said; but probably not for a week or so.

This was a dash of disappointment in the height of Marjorie's joyousness, but she went on home exulting, carrying with her, beyond all hope, all marveling, that ring. People in trouble are prone to superstition, so within the last days her feeling that, the ring once found



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and got to Warren, all the clouds would clear, had grown into a sort of certainty.

And here was the ring! All that remained was to get those two objects, the ring and Warren, together, and then — hey, presto! This, in her exultation, seemed to her an easy matter. One difficulty over, the others would go down like nine-pins. It was merely a question of somehow finding Philip quickly, before the police laid their hands on him.

Going into the Greyhound in this buoyant mood, she met her mother on the stairs, and flung backward over her shoulder at her the cry:

“I have found Mr. Warren’s ring, mother!”

And, a little further, in a passage, passing Aunt Margaret, she cried:

“Found Mr. Warren’s ring!”

Then, in her own room, she began to wonder why she had been in such a hurry to rush home, asking herself what next, and feeling wretched because there was nothing at the moment to do, save to sit inactive and stare at the ring, and let the wild throbbing of her heart subside.

Presently, she thought of her sick sister, and, locking the ring in her work-box, went to see how Hannah fared. Rather to her surprise, Hannah, who had not spoken to her all that day, received her now with something more or less like a smile.

“I hear you’ve found Mr. Warren’s ring?” was the greeting.

“Yes!” cried Marjorie.

“Can I have a look at it?” asked Hannah.

And Marjorie went and fetched it, and showed it to her.

## CHAPTER X

### "IF ONLY HE WERE HERE"

THAT night Marjorie wrote to Inspector Webster, giving him the news. She did not know at which hotel he was staying, but addressed it to Nutworth, sure that it would reach him, and, in writing the name of the town, she wondered what he was doing there. Nutworth was the nearest town of any size, and it contained the offices of Carruthers and Bennett, the Squire's solicitors. Did that fact account for the detective's presence there?

Marjorie ran out herself to post the letter, leaving the ring locked in her work-box. She laughed to herself, thinking of the detective's surprise, wondering how much weight he would attach to her discovery. She had not been able to keep from adding slyly in a postscript:

"It seems rather a mercy that I did not take myself away to London as you advised."

It was a restless night that she spent, impatient at her inaction, at the loss of time, feeling that when day broke she would work vague wonders. The thing now necessary for her peace of mind was by any means to bring Warren and the ring together. But, when morning dawned, which she had expected to bring light to her mind as to her eyes, it left her still blank, and Philip as lost as ever.

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She could think of nothing to do, except to hurry with the news to her new friend, the vicar.

At once, after breakfast, she was off, met Felix on the path between the Greyhound orchard and the vicarage shrubbery, made him rich for a month, told him with a laugh that she would not want him any more to go with her to Lancault, and went on up through the shrubbery to the vicarage, where the vicar received her with both hands, and led her into the study.

On the vicar's face sat a great gravity in those days. Davenport, his old butler, was saying that his master had aged five years in a week. Mr. Isambard placed Marjorie's easy-chair near the fire, for winds of November were moaning outside. Sitting near her at the table, and resuming his interrupted breakfast, the vicar said:

"You teem with good news, one can see, but I always first insist upon coffee for my morning visitors."

This came as a calamity upon Marjorie, meaning delay. She pleaded to be excused.

"Well, then, let me just mend the fire, and I will hear." He rose, and before he could sit again all her tale was told.

"You have found his ring?" said the vicar slowly, for he had trained himself never to exhibit surprise. "Well, that may prove a matter of some moment."

"May, sir? I say will and must!"

"Well, so I, too, say. I, too, am glad. It seems to tend towards the view that there was a duel."

"It proves it!"

"Well, since you say so — yes. I personally never doubted it, and you and I are quite at one, be assured, in the belief that Philip Warren is not a knave."

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"The thing now, sir, is to get the ring to him and him to the ring! I come to you to tell me how."

"To him?" said the vicar. "Why to him? It is for the authorities, it seems to me."

"Ah, sir, I hope you are going to trust to my instincts in this. It is for Philip to have the ring, believe me. It is his mascot."

"I see you are quite a convert to de Warrenne traditions," said the vicar somewhat dryly.

"That is easy, seeing that Philip taught me. Yet it is not a question whether his separation from the ring really means calamity for him, but that he, from his youth, has believed it. I think that if he once had the ring again, his panic would vanish, he would give himself up to the police, and would then make such a statement of facts as must clear his character, and free him from all fear of the law."

"Oh woman, great is thy faith!" cried the vicar, laying his hand upon her shoulder in a kindly way that was new to him.

"But is it so great?" asked Marjorie. "I do not see that. Since there was really a duel, as the broken ring seems to prove, what follows next? That there were two swords, surely. And where is the other? Removed and hidden — by whom? Not by Philip, apparently, for one can't conceive any motive for such conduct, so it follows that some one else must have been there, some third person."

The vicar almost allowed himself to start, those three words, "some third person," were so electric in their effect. But long practised restraint came to his aid, and he said, in an every day tone:

### *Three Men and a Maid*

"Almost you persuade me. Yet, if it was not Philip Warren who did the Squire to death in the course of a duel, how can the human mind account for — his flight?"

"That is beyond the wit of man to divine, Mr. Isambard. Let us at least be sure that there is an explanation, one which your nephew alone can give. In which case, do you not see that the thing now is to get this ring to him?"

The vicar meditated it, and then suddenly, shaking a finger at her, said, "I believe you are right! You have forgiven me, Marjorie, for having once spoken — er — lightly of you? Of late I find it hard to forgive myself."

"Pray forget it wholly," she replied. "Let us rather remember that it is Philip alone who is in question, and that I am of no importance. We have to find him, and quickly, before the authorities, for it will be far better if he gives himself up to them than that they should take him. But how, in Heaven's name, to find him?"

Mr. Isambard rose from his chair, walked through the room, looked out upon his window-garden all nipped with frost, and finally announced his decision as though it were a text:

"I will this day advertise throughout the kingdom the words, 'Your uncle has your ring' — or something of that sort."

Then Marjorie laughed with a touch of her old merri-ment.

"It will sound awfully like a pawnshop advertisement," she cried, whereat the vicar stared at her, then suddenly had a shock of quiet amusement which turned his face all red.

"Unfortunately, he hardly ever reads a newspaper,"

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sighed the girl, yielding again to the difficulty of the problem which perplexed them.

"Pity, pity," was the vicar's comment. "I have often impressed on him the duty of a modern man to read and know what is taking place in the world about him, but Philip was ever locked up in the past, and in his own dreams. Surely now, however, when he is so personally concerned in the death of Robert Courthope, he will search the papers daily to see if anything new has cropped up — don't you think so? *You* know his mind far better than I, I regret to admit."

"He may," said Marjorie, "he may now — I am not sure — probably he will."

"Then, I will advertise persistently — I can think of nothing else, except that there is a young man in London who was a close friend of his at Oxford, a dreamer like himself, I fear, and to him I might write. It is just possible he may know where Philip is hiding."

This, then, was arranged between Marjorie and Mr. Isambard. That very day the vicar wrote to an advertising agent, meaning to spend a large sum on the enterprise. Marjorie, after an almost affectionate leave-taking, started back homeward. To her surprise, she found Hannah, up and well, talking alone with James Courthope on the path at the bottom of the shrubbery. Courthope received as cold a bow as had ever frozen him, and no word was spoken as Marjorie passed on her way. But she had hardly entered her room, and was still taking off her hat and beaver stole, when Hannah came to her, saying casually, "Been to the vicarage?"

"Yes," answered Marjorie, "but I don't like secret meetings."

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"Don't you? Really? After Fennell's Tower, and all? Ah, Marjorie, you do fancy yourself — you do!"

"Don't be absurd. I mean, of course, unless you are quite sure that the man is honest, and I don't think James Courthope *is* honest."

Hannah dropped into an easy-chair, and slinging a knee between her clasped fingers said tauntingly:

"Don't you think so? Dear me, you are far off the mark this time. I hope you are not always so wrong. It's to be on the 17th of February, Marge, within three months from to-day, for I'm not one for long delays, you see. Father and mother and all Hudston will be hearing about it in another few days. Can't you see their round eyes!"

"I hope it is true," was Marjorie's quiet answer.

"How much do you hope?" asked Hannah. "Look here, Marjorie, you know that I threatened father and mother to clear out of the house, if you stayed in it. But I sha'n't go now, for I know that, if I did, they'd turn you away, not me, and I want you to stay, just to see you eat your little heart out with envy that day —"

"Oh, please go away," murmured Marjorie. "You are quite horrid."

"Yes, that'll be a bit of a shock for you, eh? And if you had only behaved yourself differently, I would have been good to you in the days of my grandeur and wealth. But you shouldn't have taken that letter out of my pocket, you never should, nor made it public to try to shame me — you shouldn't."

"As if I could help it," was the indignant reply.

"Don't care whether you could help or not — you shouldn't, you shouldn't — I'll hate and curse you for it as long as ever I live!"

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"Do try to speak more or less decently!"

"Before a lady — is that it? Ah, we'll see about the lady, as we go on. So you've been to the vicarage? What was that about?"

"Really, Hannah —"

"About the ring? Was that it? You are pretty full of that blessed ring. What did the vicar have to say about it?"

"How can you expect me to speak to you, Hannah, after hearing such dreadful words from your mouth?"

"Well, never mind, let's be friends, if you like. You should never have dared to touch my pocket, but still — let's be friends. So what did the vicar have to say about it?"

"I don't see how it concerns you. You seem to me to be growing more and more gross, though one would have thought that your friendship with the new Squire would at least tend to improve your manners."

"Well, never mind about that. You had better be friendly when one is willing to meet you half way. I asked you a question."

"The vicar means to advertise for Mr. Warren, since you wish to know," said Marjorie.

"Why?"

"To find him and give him the ring."

"I see. But what good will that do?"

"You won't understand. Mr. Warren has certain notions about the ring, you see, and we think that, if he once gets it back, he may be induced to come out of his hiding, and tell everything as it happened."

"I see," said Hannah; and she sat there museful a minute, two minutes, looking at the carpet. Then she



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sprang up, saying, "Well, I wish you luck, the whole crew of you," and went out humming.

Marjorie hardly met Hannah again that day, except at table. She spent the afternoon writing letters to friends in London to distract the impatient pressure of her thoughts, and, after posting them, went to bed early with a weary brain.

At once she fell asleep, and it was perhaps because of her utter exhaustion that at some time in the small hours of the morning she found herself awake. Her last waking thoughts had been about Inspector Webster and the ring, about the likelihood of a letter from the detective in the morning, and its probable contents. Hence, she dreamed of nothing but rings and inspectors, until the Inspector turned into the Squire, and the Squire, a dead man with power of movement, seemed to be tendering the ring to her with pitying looks. The dream was terrifying, nor did its effect cease when she opened her eyes, for she had the unnerving consciousness of another presence with her in the room, and in the darkness within and without her she thought that this was Robert Courthope, who was trying his utmost to give her the ring, but for some reason or other lacked the power to do so.

Awake, but with her mind and senses still dominated by the dim emotions of the world of visions, there she lay, afraid of the impalpable, admitting the impossible, until on a sudden she heard a sound, something that seemed to strike against some other object, very faintly — a thing that the ear would not have detected in the daytime, but in that kingdom of the night was distinct.

She sat up in bed electrified, and sharply cried out:

"Is any one there?"

There was no answer. For a long time she sat listening

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but without hearing any other noise than the beating of her heart. Then she blamed herself for being fanciful, and tried to sleep again, but in vain, and she lay there wide-eyed, until the light of dawn invaded the room.

Her first hap in the morning was a letter from Inspector Webster, who had written:

"DEAR MISS NEYLAND, — I was very pleased to receive your note with its news about the finding of the ring, which, of course, is of no great importance in the case in which we are both concerned, and yet is an interesting little discovery in its way, making me feel disposed to agree with you that it was 'rather a mercy' you did not go away to London when I suggested, though if you will now go, take my word for it you are likely to find London a more suitable place than Hudston. But, with regard to this ring, I may confess to you that I am sufficiently interested in it to wish to examine it at once, if you will let me have it for a day or so, and as I have reasons for not wishing to leave Nutworth just at present, and as I do not care that you should send the ring through the post, P. C. Bates of Hudston will call upon you to-morrow at 11 A.M. You may give it to him with confidence, and he will bring it over here to me. Meantime, you are no doubt keeping it in a perfectly safe place, since you are aware, probably, that this is advisable. One other point. You like being busy, and there is something which you can do better than I or any of the police. I want you to take that soft fellow, Felix, to Lancault with you, and see if you can wake up in him, by association of ideas on the spot, a memory of the very place in which he picked up the ring. I wish to know at once, and P. C. Bates would fail in it by frightening the man out of what little wit he has. Felix unquestionably found the ring on the morning after the tragedy, before any one else had seen the body, and if you take him there, and question him gently, reminding him of what he saw that morning, perhaps his memory will awake and furnish details. I have to

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request of you the further favor to destroy this letter by fire, and to consider its contents confidential between you and me. With my best respects, I am,

Yours faithfully,

E. C. WEBSTER.

Marjorie thoroughly enjoyed the letter, with its sly meanings and half-confidences, and duly burned it. Then she sent out a stable-man to secure Felix for her, eager to do quickly what lay in her to help on the good cause. But the messenger could not easily set eyes on Felix, and, when he did bring him, Marjorie saw that she would not have time to go with him to Lancault and be back to give P. C. Bates the ring at eleven. She therefore ran down and told Felix to return to her later, since she would have some money to give him then.

Very shortly after this, P. C. Bates arrived on a bicycle, and Marjorie, who from a window had seen him coming, ran to get the ring. In her room she took her keys from her pocket, unlocked her work-box, and took out from its under-chamber the *écrin* in which she had placed the ring, stuck in a slit of velvet side by side with another ring of her own, for good company.

But now, when she pressed the spring of the *écrin*, and the lid flew back, there was her own ring quite safe, but the Warren ring was gone. Her eyes took in the fact, the truth gradually bit its torment into her brain, the tiny case dropped from her hand, and she stood in stone.

Somehow she made her way down to the constable. She told him what had happened. He spoke some words to her, but she hardly understood him. Several times she said wildly to him, "The ring is gone!" giving him the news afresh.

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She was conscious that when he could get no answers to the point from her, he leaped on to his bicycle and rode off in the direction of Nutworth. Some time afterwards, she found herself sitting like a child at her aunt's knees, staring and sobbing. Her sister entered the room, and she sprang to her feet with something of animal quickness and ferocity.

"Hannah," she almost screamed, "have you taken the ring?"

"What ring are you talking about?" was the flippant answer.

"Hannah," cried the half-frantic girl again, "have you stolen my ring?"

"You had better mind what you are saying, hadn't you?" came the bitter retort. "You must think I am the same as you, going to other people's pockets in the dead of the night."

Not another word passed between them. Breaking into a fresh outburst of tears, Marjorie was so overcome, so sunk in dejection, that she could hardly speak or lift her head. But she had work to do for Inspector Webster "at once," and, toward evening, she roused herself, and asked if Felix had come back in the afternoon to her, as she had bid him. Felix, however, had not come, and she sent out some one to seek him in the village.

It was getting dark when her scout came back with the tidings that Felix could not be found, having apparently gone to a sale of farm stock at St. Brevels. Hearing this, she forced herself to rise from the sofa where she lay, and started out wearily on the road to St. Brevels, resolved not to put off to to-morrow the duty that lay near her.

She walked two miles, half way to St. Brevels, and

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then had to sit down to rest on a seat near a rock which the country people called the Devil's Chair. The high wind which swept over the moor had been blowing straight against her, and had added to her weariness. And there was no sign of the returning Felix.

She was a long while sitting there, expecting the appearance of the idiot on the road. Like a deranged mechanism her brain kept on repeating to her a sentence which she seemed to have been hearing for a century:

"The ring is gone — forever this time; and you will never get it again."

There was no moon as yet, but there was some light. The stars which thronged the vault of heaven seemed to grow ever brighter as the wind moaned more dismally. In heaven was peace, but earth was rough to her.

In this way over an hour went by, and it was well past nine o'clock when at last a little troop of feet came sauntering along the road, and there was Felix towering among a cohort of boys. She rose and announced to Felix that he had to come with her. He drew back, but when she insisted, and the boys told him that he must obey, he consented. Marjorie walked with them half a mile toward Hudston; then, at the iron gate across the by-path which led down to Lancault, she and Felix went on alone.

She gave him some coppers, spoke coaxingly to him, and explained what was the business on hand. By this time they had come near the church, and there, ten yards before them, was the little door which they were about to enter. In that dead place all was as still as the tombs it held, save the murmuring wind, the rush of a rabbit, and in the old oak in the field above a white owl hooting. But when she approached the door on the south side of the

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church, Marjorie all at once stopped short, and clutched Felix's sleeve.

She became deathly white, nor could she have told whether she had seen something within the church, or whether she had heard something there. She only understood that some presence was there, and, in her sense of standing face to face with the ineffable, the company of the idiot failed her, it lacked humanity and support, and she seemed to find herself alone with what was in there in the dark.

She held Felix by the sleeve. Both stood still, hushed, suspended, breathless, awaiting what the next instant should bring forth.

Then Marjorie gave a sob of utter relief, for the spirits of the dead do not strike matches, and a match was struck within the church, which revealed to her a form — a man's form — bent down under the light, searching the floor with care, like a miser searching in the dust for wealth. And she saw, or thought she saw, a face which was dear to her.

The next instant the night heard far her cry of ecstasy, "*Philip!*"

She had hardly shrieked that name, when, like a thief detected at midnight, the man had leaped and was gone — round the corner of the church — up northward over the boundary wall into the field of the oak — flying as from death, and she after him, for dear life.

*"Philip!"*

It was a call with pity and love in it to touch a stone, but it seemed not to touch him, who should have loved her, and, in the turmoil of her thought, it struck her as hard and ill-ordained that he could run fast, and she not.

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With little womanly wailings of "Oh!" and "Help!" and "Stop, dear Philip!" all breathless, she chased him up the hill, stumbling over her gown, her heart calling out to Heaven for aid. Every few steps, summoning all her energies, putting her very soul into it, she sent out upon the breeze the plaints of her pealing "*Philip!*"

She heard when the man passed through the iron gate, how mercilessly he slammed it upon her, for its clang sounded far. But when she, too, passed through, and was out on the road, his flying form was still in sight, and she called after him, but he paid no heed to her, avoiding her like his bane.

And she thought then that if she could but cry to him, "I have your ring — come back!" that would capture him, for she knew that he had only returned to the church in order to seek his ring. But the ring was gone from her, too, and though the lie was on her lips, she would not shriek. Another minute, and a bend of the road hid him from her, whereupon she stood still, swaying this way and that. The firm earth seemed all in a waltz about her head, sweeping round and round slowly, but steadily, and now she was about to drop, when a man seemed to arise and run up out of nowhere to her, and she lay in his arms.

She knew, as her senses failed, that the man was Inspector Webster, that he had come from the very direction in which Philip had run away, and her last sensation before she fainted was one of amazement that he had failed to recognize Philip — he, the skilled detective, who had said that he "knew all" about Philip's appearance!

## CHAPTER XI

### SOME PICTURE-TAKING

MARJORIE's collapse arose from physical exhaustion. She had endured much during these recent days, and had neglected to maintain her bodily strength, so the sharp run and the frenzy of her emotions at the sight of her lover toppled over the balance which nature maintains between the possible and the impossible.

But a girl of her perfect physique could not long remain insensible. Soon the strong life within fluttered back to eyes and lips, and her first startled glance fell on the anxious face of Inspector Webster. Fortunately, in the half dawn of her returning reason, she heard him questioning Felix, who, whimpering his alarm, had ambled after her.

"Who was it? What had you seen?" demanded the detective.

"I think, sir, it mun ha' bin a ghaist," cried the half-witted one.

"Ghosts do not slam gates, nor do their feet crunch gravel. Miss Neyland was shouting to some one named 'Philip' to 'come back.' Did you see Mr. Warren?"

"It mun ha' bin a ghaist. There's ghaists in Lancault," blubbered Felix.



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Webster muttered something under his breath, but he felt Marjorie trying to raise herself in his arms, and he relaxed his tight grip.

"Are you better, Miss Neyland?" he said. "Now you see what comes of not taking my advice. You would have avoided all this excitement had you gone to London. But tell me, if you are able, who it was you were pursuing."

"I thought," she faltered, trying desperately to recover her shaken wits, "I thought I saw Mr. Warren."

"But you could not be mistaken. Of all men, you would know him. And did he not answer?"

Each second her brain was clearing. She understood that it would be useless to try and mislead the detective. Whatever the outcome, if Philip were to be lodged in a felon's cell that night, she could not further his cause by withholding her confidence just then. And Webster should have been able to see Philip even more distinctly.

"I really cannot tell you anything more positive," she answered. "I was only endeavoring to fulfil my promise to you. Felix has been away from Hudston all day. I went to meet him, induced him to come with me to the churchyard down there, and, just as we were entering the ruins, I fancied I heard some one moving inside. I was frightened, but quite in possession of my senses. I saw, or thought I saw, a match being struck, and then I was sure that Mr. Warren stood before me. I spoke to him, there was no answer. Rather did he seem to fly at the mere sound of my voice. I followed, crying I scarce know what. Then, when I was utterly spent, you appeared suddenly. I have concealed nothing. I have told you all that happened. If it is a dream, I shall never wake again."

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"Queer thing!" muttered Mr. Webster. "Queerest case I have ever met. So you found and lost the ring again, Miss Neyland? Are you able to walk towards the village? On our way you can tell me all about it."

With a positive start Marjorie realized that this strange man did not wish to hear any further details of the present adventure. He dismissed it utterly, swept it aside as though it were some crazy invention of the idiot. Yet he must have heard and seen almost as much as she heard and saw. What was his motive? Did he regard as naught the actual presence of Philip Warren in a place which was ringing with the denunciation of Squire Courthope's murderer? And how was it that he should suddenly appear on that deserted road at Hudston, when he was supposed to be in Nutworth, and to have the intention of remaining there a week?

Somehow, his attitude brought a gladness to her heart. And while she was telling him of the ring's disappearance, she awoke to the fact that her sister was her sworn foe, against whom she must contend with all skill and artifice if she were to take the noose off her lover's neck.

Webster said little as they approached Hudston. Marjorie kept back none of her doubts and suspicions. She followed each twist and turn of conjecture, and did not cloak her belief that Hannah was shielding the slayer of Robert Courthope. Webster listened, hummed, said "Ah!" and "Indeed!" and generally indulged in non-committal phrases. Even his seeming candor was sphinx-like.

"Have you determined to remain in Hudston?" asked Marjorie. "I was told you had left for a week. If I want you in a hurry, how shall I be able to find you?"

### *Three Men and a Maid*

"Call at the inn. Say that you wish to see me at a certain hour, and I shall be with you at the time and place fixed. If not, you will find some one who represents me."

"Have you any instructions to give me before we part?"

"What did I tell you yesterday morning?"

"That I was to breathe my suspicions to no one except you."

"Well —"

"But I have not."

"Why did you say, then, you had found Mr. Warren's ring?"

"I see. You mean that I am not to discuss affairs at all."

"Yes. I am sorry now I did not caution you more fully."

"Because you would like Mr. Warren to have his ring again?"

"I have nothing to do with that. My business is with crime and criminals, not with moon-struck people who cling to legends."

"Ah," she cried almost joyfully, "you are admitting that Mr. Warren is not a criminal."

The detective put forth a horrified hand at her and turned abruptly away with a hasty "Good night." But he stopped in the shadow of a house and watched her trim figure flitting down the dimly-lighted village street. Close to Marjorie shambled the ungainly form of Felix.

"Philip Warren may or may not be a criminal," thought Webster, "but he is several kinds of a fool to run so hard when a girl like that is chasing him."

On reaching the Greyhound, Marjorie became conscious that Felix was still following her. She gave him some silver and whispered:

## *Some Picture-taking*

"Say nothing about the ghost. If you do, it will haunt you always."

Never had the idiot's tongue been quieted so effectively. Nothing short of torture would wring a word from his lips as to events that night in Lancault churchyard.

Marjorie was received with some clamor at home.

"Funny goin's on be these," grumbled her father. "They said you were off to London this mornin', an' here be you wanderin' about Hudston lanes after ten o'clock at night. I don't like it, lass, an' you'd better end it."

"Father," she said, "have you, too, lost faith in me?"

A wave of tenderness and sympathy for the troubles which had overwhelmed the man sprung up in her. It was useless to pretend that she had not gone out of the lives of the old couple who dwelt in that narrow environment of the inn and its "season," but she was, nevertheless, their daughter, and she was sorry for them.

Jonas was somewhat shaken by her words, and he could not maintain his angry look before her steadfast gaze.

"No, no, lass, not that," he growled, "but folks do be sayin' all sorts, and this be a quiet place, not used to the ways of big towns. I suppose now, no one would think it wrong if Fennell's Tower was in the middle of London."

Were it not for the gloom in her soul she could have laughed. She bent forward and kissed him.

"Bad people will think wrong of anybody anywhere," she said, "but I want mother and you to help me now, not to be vexed with me because you do not understand everything that occurs."

"Well, well, lass," said Jonas, scratching a perplexed

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head. "I wouldn't give tuppence what was said if Hannah and you were to make up your differences."

"But that will never be, for she is my worst enemy."

"Dang it all, Marjorie, if you quarrel wi' her an' drive her away, the business will go to wrack an' ruin."

"It shall not. I promise you that. I can draw twenty customers to the Greyhound to the one she can attract. I will help you and serve you to the utmost. But I cannot and will not leave Hudston. If I am not permitted to remain at home, I shall hire a room in the village."

"Nay, nay. That shall never be, while there is a bed an' a bite in thy father's house."

"Quite touching!" came a sneering voice from the end of the passage in which Marjorie and her father were standing. Hannah, with the soft tread of a cat stalking a mouse, had crept into ear-shot when she heard her sister enter.

A fierce impulse rose in Marjorie's breast to denounce the woman who had betrayed her and Philip in order to gratify a lust for money and position. But she crushed her wrath, and found joy rather in practising a new-born patience.

"I mean it, Hannah," she said quietly. "I cannot see any reason why you and I should quarrel. You are in a fair way to gain all. I have lost all. If I am satisfied, why should you war against me?"

Hannah was struck suddenly dumb by this avowal. She had expected Marjorie to come home in a hot rage after the shock of losing the ring had passed.

And Jonas said hurriedly, thinking to patch up the unexpected truce between his offspring:

"That's better. What is there to fight about? Nowt,

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to my mind. Ye'll be hungry, Marjorie. Come along an' get summat to eat."

Something to eat is a specific against all other evils in Yorkshire. So Marjorie, buoyed up with the knowledge that Philip Warren lived and was not far distant, sat and ate a hearty meal, and Hannah watched her, wondering and doubting, and torturing her mind with indecision whether to declare undying hate or pretend to let bygones be bygones.

Next morning there was a curious transition in the Greyhound. Marjorie and Hannah changed places. Without any discussion, by a sort of tacit agreement, Marjorie became the housekeeper and Hannah the lady of leisure. Before the close of the week the new order was firmly established.

In a small village, such a shuffling of parts in the characters of a drama with whose every twist and turn all Hudston was familiar could not fail to attract attention.

And there were several unexpected developments. In the first instance, the Greyhound did a roaring trade. Not only the shop-keepers and farmers of Hudston, but the local gentry for miles around, made one excuse or another to drop into the hotel and exchange a few words with Jonas or his pretty daughter. They all treated Marjorie with respect and sympathy. Her mere presence was enough to check the rough speech of some of the livelier spirits. Even the hotel servants came to her help, and, whereas Hannah, at busy periods, had to use her hands, Marjorie found that it was sufficient to give directions to waiters and maids, and these humble assistants did all in their power to lighten her labors.

Each evening she did not fail to visit Lancault. Her

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resolve was fixed now that no stupid terror or ghostly manifestations should prevent her from challenging any one she met there. Nevertheless, on quiet nights, she heard nothing but the echo of her own footsteps on the worn slabs, and, when the weather was harsh, the sobbing of the wind through the ivy was in unison with her own sad thoughts.

And Philip came not. He seemed to have passed into the region of the dead.

One afternoon, in the smoking-room of the inn, the head keeper of the Courthope estate attracted Marjorie's artistic eye. He was a man of middle age, with the sturdy, oak-like aspect induced by his calling. Dressed in green corduroy, with gun, game-bag, and attendant retriever, he made a picturesque figure, and the girl made a sketch of him, as a drawing-block and color box chanced to be at hand.

Jonas and he had much to talk about. A colony of foxes in a neighboring covert was playing havoc with game and chickens, so when the keeper rose to go Marjorie had caught a very fair portrait.

"By gum, miss," said he, when she showed it to him, "that's the finest thing I've seen for many a day. I must have it, whatever the price. Now, what'll be the cost of it?"

She demanded five shillings for the Cottage Hospital fund, and velveteens cheerfully deposited the coins in a box provided for the purpose. He carried off his treasure. Within an hour, Marjorie had three sitters. Next day she was honored by a commission from James Courthope.

Now, James's visits to the Greyhound had been rare of

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late, and Hannah's Sunday clothes had been displayed to a wondering village without their proper setting of an accompanying and obedient squire.

Hannah had written to the Court, and James replied, reasonably enough, that he was busy with estate affairs connected with the succession. It was not to Hannah's liking, therefore, that his first hour of leisure should be given to portrait-painting, even for the benefit of the sick, and he was hardly across the threshold of the inn before she came to meet him.

"I was looking out of my bedroom window, and saw you riding down the street," she explained. "Have you come to take me for a walk?"

"No," he said coolly. "That was not my idea. My head keeper showed me a sketch of Marjorie's, and I dropped in to ask her to do a large one of my noble self."

"Sorry I can't draw, but I am still able to talk," snapped Hannah.

"You are the only woman able to draw me," was the pleasant answer. "Come, Hannah, why be vexed with me? Robert is hardly dead yet, so it would be bad taste to parade our courtship before the village gapers. Or do you suspect me of wishing to flirt with your small sister? If so, come with me and listen."

It might be that Hannah was shocked at hearing James Courthope speak thus flippantly of his dead cousin, but she paled somewhat and her voice fell.

"You know well enough that Robert is dead," she murmured. "Perhaps he died too soon to suit some people's wishes."

But, for all that, she followed obediently to the cozy



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smoking-room, where Marjorie was mixing a deeper tint of brick red to reproduce the complexion of a well-known local breeder of prize cattle.

The gallant James was quite at his ease. He admired Marjorie's work, complimented the bovine gentleman on recent successes in the show ring, and hoped that the fair artist would confer immortality on him by painting a picture of size.

"That would mean working in oil and setting up a studio," said Marjorie, lightly. "I am far too busy nowadays for such an undertaking. But I don't mind adding you to my gallery of other local celebrities if you are content with a water-color wash."

"Perhaps I may tempt you later," said Courthope. "Meanwhile, the water-color, by all means."

"Will you sit there?" she asked, indicating a chair.

"I would rather take my punishment standing," laughed he.

"Please yourself. I thought that if you were seated, and Hannah stood beside you, I could get two turtle-doves into one picture."

Hannah's eyes sparkled, and the stock-breeder stared fixedly, but James was unruffled.

"A capital notion," he agreed. "And it means safety, too. However critically you may survey me, Miss Marjorie, you will be tender towards your sister."

The man of pedigree short-horns paid for his sketch, and ordered another drink and a big cigar. "I wouldn't ha' missed it for a fiver," he said afterwards to his cronies. "By gad, between one sister an' t'other, Clever Jimmie is fairly roped."

Hannah, flushed with triumph, yet amazed that Mar-

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jorie should play into her hands so openly, posed herself behind Courthope's chair, and the work began.

"May I talk?" asked James.

"Not to me," said Marjorie. "I want you to have a pleasant expression, so you may speak to Hannah if you like, but do not move until I have worked in the rough outlines."

"Isn't it rather hard that the man who pays should not be able to choose the style of his portrait?"

"I'm sorry. I fancied I was earning your gratitude by my suggestion."

"Oh yes. Of course. But if I want to scowl I can do so, I suppose?"

"That would not be flattering to Hannah."

"If I must flatter you, Hannah, I shall smile broadly."

"Do sit quiet, James dear. How can you expect Marjorie to do us justice if you interfere by your chatter?"

Hannah prided herself on her ability to be bold at the right moment. Courthope surveyed the fit of his gaiters; the delighted stock-raiser finished a long drink at a gulp; but Marjorie's face revealed nothing save interest in the task she had set herself.

When the drawing was ended, it was admitted that she had been remarkably successful in catching the characteristics of both subjects. It was a really excellent little study of two people who lent themselves to striking portraiture, but it was noteworthy that, whereas Hannah's right hand had rested on the back of Courthope's chair, in the drawing it was grasping his shoulder, and gave him an odd appearance of being held in the seat against his will.

With that exception, the picture was charming, and

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Hannah praised it unstintingly. Indeed, she almost carried her sisterly appreciation to the point of kissing Marjorie, but a sudden flash in Marjorie's eyes warned her that any such assumption of gush would be a failure.

"And now," said James, after a critical glance at the sketch, "I have kept the sordid aspect of the affair to the last — the price?"

"I have a sliding-scale," smiled Marjorie. "I charge village folk five shillings, people from a distance ten, but squires and knights should rank at a sovereign, I suppose."

"With me added, the cost will be another sovereign, then?" broke in Hannah, promptly.

"Two pounds," said James. "I consider the allegory worth a third. Let me place three pounds in your hospital box, Miss Marjorie, and I am well content."

He left the inn at once, carrying the sketch with him. Hannah, after taking thought, hunted for a dictionary to find the meaning of "allegory." Marjorie was sipping a cup of tea when Hannah came back to her.

"Think yourself smart, eh, to show everybody that I had James under my thumb?" was the outburst. "Well, it's only fit and proper that he should know it, and you, too. I know what you would like, my fine lady, but you must not try any of your tricks with this Squire, whatever you did with the last one."

"Go away," said Marjorie.

"I'll go or stop, just as I please, and let me tell you —"

"If you do not go away," said Marjorie, without the least sign of heat or annoyance in voice or manner, "I will throw this tea in your face. If that does not suffice the cup will follow."

For once, Hannah was frightened. She retreated a pace.

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"You would not dare," she cried.

Marjorie sipped another spoonful, and answered not.

"As you have to work for father and mother, I won't cause any further row," said Hannah loftily, and soon she was busy at the piano, preparing for the new life at the Court, when she would be Mrs. Courthope, and perhaps "her ladyship," for James had ambitions, and now he was wealthy he would strive to give them effect.

But that night a note was slipped into Marjorie's hand by a youth as she sped through the village on her way to Lancault. It was from James Courthope, and it ran:

"I must see you and talk to you, alone, in some place where we cannot be disturbed. I know you go to Lancault churchyard each evening, but you might misconstrue my motives if I waylaid you, so I write thus openly to ask for an interview. Your own future happiness, not to mention mine, is at stake. I pray you give me this meeting. I promise not to distress you in any way. My object is to make clear a good deal that is dark to you now. Without your help I am powerless; with it, I can move mountains.

"I read your message in the picture to-day. But you are in the wrong: if you think I can be forced to marry Hannah. That is not in her power nor in the power of any one now living. You see, I am not afraid to trust you by writing my views. For the rest, I must speak to you, without stint or reservation. To-morrow, and the next day, and the next, I shall be at Fennell's Tower at 5 P.M. Take care that you are not followed. If the coast is clear once you reach the moor, come there quickly. You will find me inside."

Marjorie smiled, with the quiet elation of one who is gratified at an occurrence which chimes with an opinion

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previously formed. She forthwith wrote on a sheet of the hotel note-paper:

"I shall keep this appointment to-morrow. Kindly take care of James Courthope's letter. M. N."

She enclosed both in an envelope, which she addressed to Inspector Webster, and posted the missive herself.

"Unless I am greatly mistaken, there will be three people present at that interview," she thought, with a grim satisfaction.

And, indeed, she was more than right.

## CHAPTER XII

### HOW ALL ROADS LED TO THE TOWER

By chance, Inspector Webster dropped into the Greyhound next morning. Like many others, he wished to have his portrait painted.

Jonas was there, and, in response to the innkeeper's question, the detective stated that there was no news yet concerning Philip Warren's whereabouts.

"I see that his uncle is advertising for him," he said, "but the police will find him long before he sees the advertisement, if he is really the careless sort of fellow you Hudston folk declare him to be. As for me, I am losing interest in the case. It is so simple. Find Warren, and the thing has ended. There was a duel; the charge is reduced to manslaughter; counsel pleads temperament, and judge says 'twelve months' if he is in a good humor."

"So you have changed your opinions, Mr. Webster?" put in Marjorie.

"That is the privilege of all really great men, Miss Neyland. It is a sign of the judicial mind."

"You'll be leavin' us soon, I reckon?" asked Jonas.

"Well, to be accurate, I shall not be in Hudston at five o'clock to-day. But I am coming back, not on business — rather for a short holiday, not unconnected with

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rabbit-shooting. Then, Mr. Neyland, if you can find room for me, I shall put up at the Greyhound."

Marjorie bent over her drawing. These impressionist sketches of hers were usually dashed off in a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, but she worked at Mr. Webster's portrait so long that her father's curiosity was aroused, and he looked over her shoulder.

"By gum!" said he admiringly, "that be real menseful."

For behold! Webster was glorified by Spring. The detective's manly form was set off by a background of almond blossom; he stood on a carpet of daffodils and blue-bells; and Spring typifies Hope.

While genuinely pleased with the sketch when Marjorie handed it to him, he was not blind to its message.

"Yes," he said slowly, "it is very beautiful. Art can adorn even a policeman in plain clothes. I admit, a second time, I was wrong, Miss Neyland. London's loss is Hudston's gain."

"That is a real compliment," she said, as their eyes met.

"It is not flattery, at any rate. Have you any other portraits in your portfolio?"

She understood his meaning. Had she in her possession some such vivid suggestion of Philip Warren. For a moment she was dubious, not as to the fact, but as to the extent she could trust the detective. Yet, in sending him James Courthope's letter she had burnt her boats, so she answered, after a second's hesitation:

"Yes. Oddly enough, I have one little study of somewhat unusual interest. It is in a small packet, and you can examine it at your leisure."

She ran upstairs, and secured a sealed brown paper-wrapped parcel from the depths of a jumble of canvas

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and cartridge paper. It contained a study of Robert Courthope and Philip fencing, in the rectory garden, and was so extraordinarily life-like and realistic that she had not been able to bear the thought of looking at it since the day after the duel.

Hannah, hovering about the upper floor in uneasy grandeur of attire, saw Marjorie go down to the smoking-room, carrying an unobtrusive parcel, and she watched Webster stroll down the street, smoking as usual, and holding this same parcel in his hand.

"Ah!" commented Hannah, "I don't like that man. What has she been giving him?"

Jonas Neyland, judiciously pumped, yielded no definite information.

"There was summat aboot paintin'," said he, "but it was just what them artist chaps tell yan another in the season. It seems this detective knows the lingo. An' he's comin' to live here for a bit. Kind o' sport, he is. I s'pose there's not much rabbitin' to be done in London."

"For a man as keeps a big 'otel, you're hawful ignorant, Jonas," put in Aunt Margaret, who was listening.

"Mebbe," retorted Neyland, ever ready to be irritated by his sister-in-law's assumption of superior knowledge. "Happen I'm just daft enough to keep my hard-earned brass i' my pocket."

"Brass!" snorted Aunt Margaret, "you never earned tuppence in your life, Jonas Neyland. First, your wife, then Hannah, and now Marjorie, has had to keep a roof over your head. If you hadn't a woman to look after you —"

But Jonas fled, regretting the boomerang effect of his taunt, which implied that the old lady had drawn a hun-



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dred pounds from the bank wherewith to finance Marjorie's needs had she gone to London.

At half-past four o'clock, when the village was sleepily composing itself for the long winter evening, Marjorie slipped on hat and jacket to take some small order to a tradesman. By crossing the churchyard, and thus passing the Courthope vault, where a monumental mason from Nutworth was chipping letters in the stone to place on record the virtues of the red Squire, she reached the quiet lane in which Robert had met the vicar on that fatal night.

Thence, taking a more circuitous path, she re-entered the lane near the moorland gate. The road was deserted. Had any one followed her by either route, she must have seen them. She breasted the hill rapidly until she gained the shelter of a clump of gorse. Here a glance at her watch showed that she had ten minutes in which to cover the few hundred yards which yet separated her from Fennell's Tower.

This was her first visit to the place since Philip and she left it together, hand-in-hand, tremulous, overflowing with the avowal of their love, yet shaken by the awe of their adventure, and shadowed by imminent tragedy. And now, what was her mission? To listen to the frenzied pleading of another man, to play with him and cajole him until her sister, roused to mad jealousy, unburdened herself of that secret and most potent knowledge which kept James Courthope a smiling and unwilling captive.

That was her plan, and she had bided her time until James Courthope himself sought his own destruction. She was bitter against him, even more bitter against the faithless Hannah. She was a woman fighting alone for

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the man she loved, and she clenched her hands now in desperate resolve to watch those two rushing to the brink of the pit until one or other of them shrieked aloud the words which should clear Philip Warren's name.

The wind whistled cold and shrill on the moors. Never had Fennell's Tower looked so bleak, not even on that night of all surprises. Strong in heart and mind as she was, Marjorie shuddered a little at the thought of being shut up in that gaunt old ruin with James Courthope. The desolate heather seemed scarce to harbor a sheep or a wild bird, and it needed all her confidence to believe that Inspector Webster would surely not fail her at this crisis.

And then a notion possessed her which brought back the blood to her cheeks. There were, as she well knew, several nooks and dim recesses in the two stories of the Tower. Webster, having read Courthope's note, would assume that the latter would be at the rendezvous long before the lady. What was to prevent the detective from hiding there earlier still? In that case, it was fairly certain that if Marjorie were to cry for help, she would not have to struggle long against the bold, passionate wooer whom she dreaded and loathed.

There was consolation in the thought. After another slow scrutiny of the deserted country-side towards the village, she stepped forth with renewed confidence.

The ascending path led straight to the door of the tower, which was half open, exactly as it had been left when the farmer's boy unlocked it in response to Philip's shouts. Long disuse had rusted the hinges and warped the wood, so it was a stubborn door, ready to jam at any point; it moved groaningly when force was applied; were

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it untouched it would remain half open for another century or two, until it rotted. Hence, she reasoned, it would be nearly dark in there, and she shuddered again, though the quick walk and upward trend of the path had flushed her face and restored the sparkle to her eyes.

Yet she pressed on. With a murmured prayer on her lips, and one backward glance along the road she had come, she climbed the rough steps and peered within. Her figure dimmed the small space of rough floor which was lit by the narrow opening, but a smooth, pleasant voice welcomed her:

"Come in, Miss Marjorie," it said. "Don't be timid. I would gladly have invited you to a more cheerful trysting-place, but Hudston, like night, has a thousand eyes. And, when all is said and done, this crazy old watch-tower is more or less bound up with your life and mine. Better come in. Don't stand there. Having ventured a mile you may well advance another yard."

Although it was James Courthope who spoke, and she had never met any man whom she distrusted so greatly, there was a restraint, a reasonableness, in his words which reassured her.

She entered the doorway, and her alert eyes saw him standing in the middle of the big, barn-like room. Directly in front was the steep ladder which gave access to the upper floor. The trap-door was open, and, even while Courthope was speaking, she fancied she heard a faint chink of falling stone which sounded to her strained ears as being both within and without the building.

But Courthope had either not heard, or, if he did hear, gave no heed to the noise, and, to Marjorie's thinking, it

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was an indication of the unseen presence of her friend and ally, the detective. And she found she must say something, because Courthope, with a fine tact, did not move. Indeed, he did not so much as offer to shake hands with her.

"Well, I am here," she said, forcing a smile, and wondering that she could speak so calmly when her heart throbbed at such an alarming rate.

"It is very good of you, very kind and gracious. Believe me, no matter what you may think of me in the future, whether you regard me as a friend or an enemy, I shall never forget your action to-day. I ought to have expected it from one of your high character, but there are so many adverse currents in my life that I admit I was afraid you might refuse my request."

"Thank you, but I do not merit any extravagant praise for taking half an hour's walk, and thus obliging my sister's promised husband."

"Ah, you have decided to open the battle? Be it so! A lady may surely claim the privilege accorded to the gentlemen of the Guard. But I have much to say. Will you not sit down? There is a wood-chopping block which I have placed for you, near the door, but somewhat out of the draft. As for me, I remain here. You see, I am anxious, above all things, to make you feel that I have sought this meeting on no unworthy pretense. My motives are fair enough, from my point of view, and most certainly honorable to you."

Marjorie was glad to be seated. James Courthope might be a villian, but he was a polite one; she acknowledged a feeling almost of gratitude for his thoughtfulness. He was evidently wishful to put her at her ease before he

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broached the subject of his letter, and, in very truth, she was a little shaken for the moment.

"I implied no hostility by my words, Mr. Courthope," said she. "My sister's plain statements and your own attitude towards her —"

"Warranted you in assuming that we were an engaged couple," he went on, seeing that she hesitated. "That is one good reason for our talk to-day. I may have acted foolishly when I was a penniless dependent on my cousin Robert's bounty. Hannah has a pretty face, and I admit that I found her attractive roguishness not displeasing. But circumstances alter cases, Marjorie. When I bring a lady to grace my board, her name will not be Hannah. That is as fixed a thing as the rising of to-morrow's sun. And please do not think that I am a man of changeable mind, who seeks a rose in every garden, and vows there is none to equal the flower of his latest fancy. That is not at all a true estimate of my character. I am really blessed, or cursed, with an unbending temperament, rigid as steel, though perhaps able to yield apparently to outward convention. As the French say, I recoil in order to spring farther, and I beg of you to remember that I recoiled from Hannah long before recent events shook our little world of Hudston."

"It seems to me that this explanation, unpleasant though it may be, should be given to Hannah," said Marjorie, dimly awakening to the fact that James Courthope was putting his case with exceeding plausibleness.

"All in good time. Hannah is a difficult person. You know what I mean. She is not a lady. She would scream and rave, and declare her woes to the street, and gather a mob to watch her breaking my windows. These dis-

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agreeable symptoms of overthrown ambition can be avoided. Time is a great healer. You, who have suffered, are with me in that. The bitterness of last week is more bearable to-day than it was in the first hours of agony. But leave me to deal with Hannah. I pass from her, with one question. Do you believe me when I say that she will never, under any possible conditions, be the lady of the manor of Hudston?"

Marjorie gasped a little. She knew what was coming, and summed all her strength to twist events towards the good hap of Philip.

"Unquestionably, your words are not those of a devoted lover," she answered, trying to be flippant.

"Then that clears some of the thorns from my path," said Courthope, half turning from her and facing the door, thus giving her the opportunity of searching his face with her eager eyes. The man would have made an actor of note. He had perfect self-command, physical and mental. Though he longed to clasp Marjorie to his heart and kiss away her protests, he forebore. Any such sensational love-making would be fatal to his success. He must hold himself in a tight hand. It was a great thing that Marjorie was there, listening and half-convinced. In the strenuous days to come she would not forget; all the time the image of Philip Warren would be fading; all the time the quiet, steadfast worship offered her by James Courthope would be a growing force. Though he positively glowed with ardor, his cold, cynical intellect bade him be still. A diamond, hard and scintillating, might reason thus if it were capable of emotion.

There was a prolonged silence before he spoke again.

In that tomb-like tower the deepening gloom had a

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sense of power and mystery. It was kin to the ambiguous nature of their meeting. Even Courthope, wrapped in one consuming furnace of hope and fear, was alive to its influence.

"Marjorie," he said at last, "I can endure my torture no longer. Yet, before you condemn me, I pray you wait and search your very soul. Marjorie, I love you! God, how I want you! Man has never loved woman more ardently than I love you. But you must not decide my fate to-day. Though I felt that my brain would yield to the strain if I did not tell you of my longing, I only wish you to know it, to ponder it, to have some knowledge of the agony which is gnawing at my vitals. Then, perhaps, some day, you may have pity on me and tell me — tell me — that I may hope."

Again the dark silence smote them like a chord of solemn music. The pleading in the man's voice left its vibrato in the girl's ears. For an instant, she was woefully afraid of the intense passion she had aroused, but the love of this wooer was as the mad revel of a satyr, and she almost felt Philip Warren's arms around her as she murmured with bent head:

"I am glad — you realize — that I — I cannot answer you now, Mr. Courthope. You must — wait."

She was running a dreadful risk, she knew. She was playing with fire in holding out any sort of encouragement to this unscrupulous and daring man. She held herself prepared to rush to the door and escape to the moor, strong in the belief that he would not pursue her, but rather seek to dispel her fears.

But in the very instant that Courthope turned to her, his pale face aflame with triumph, they both heard

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a movement as of some one rising out of a cramped position. Before Marjorie could shriek or her companion choke back the oath that rose to his lips, a rapid, steady footstep advanced towards them, and Philip Warren, looking from one to the other with the accusing eye of an incensed judge, said:

"Miss Neyland may not be able to answer you to-day, James Courthope, but I can. Your cousin Robert fought me for her, and won, and I swear by high heaven that if he does not marry her you shall not, you self-admitted liar."

Courthope, for all his splendid nerve, was stricken dumb by this apparition, but Marjorie tottered towards Philip, her arms outstretched and every pulse delirious with joy at the mere sight of him.

"Philip, oh, Philip!" she murmured, breathless, and almost fainting.

He shrank from her as though she were a leper. There was no mistaking his attitude. He seemed to think that her touch would contaminate him. He would not even meet her appealing eyes, or trust himself to hear the words which came from her trembling lips.

"I can have nothing to say to this lady," he went on, in a slow, measured speech, which was so unlike his wonted impulsive utterance. "I fought for her, and lost her, and God knows that my heart was broken by that losing. I pledged my faith not to see or speak to her for five years, and I have kept my vow in the spirit if not in the letter. And now, James Courthope, I find you trying, not without some success, to steal her from your cousin. What kind of mean beast can you be? Is there no truth on earth? Has honor gone from man and fidelity from woman?"



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But you have two honest men to bar your wolf's path. Not Robert Courthope only, but I —"

Then James found his voice, and he cried in loud fury, for he feared nothing above ground or beneath:

"Robert Courthope! What has he to do with vows and pledges? Why do you prate of the dead?"

"The dead! Why did he die, and when?"

"You dare to ask me that; you, his murderer?"

"You lie, James. Let this lady go from here, and I shall prove it to you."

"No doubt one more crime will not deter you. But, whether you know it or not — and you are fool enough to be actually unaware of your own deed — you stabbed Robert Courthope to the heart when you fought him in Lancault Churchyard, and the police are now scouring the country for you."

James was recovering his wits. Of the three he was rapidly becoming the most ordered in mind, and he calculated, with lightning rapidity, that this extraordinary and altogether unlooked-for appearance of Philip might be twisted to his own great advantage. Yet his heart did quail a little when he heard Marjorie's low wail of anguish:

"Oh, Philip, why do you use such cruel words to me! Philip, dear, let me explain. Take me away, oh, take me away, and let me tell you all."

But Warren would have none of her proffered embraces. She dropped to her knees and wept pitifully nevertheless, he studiously avoided her, and replied to Courthope in the same metallic voice.

"It may be as you say, that Robert is dead. If he is, I am guiltless of his death. When we parted, he was a

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strong man armed, I defenseless and beaten. I begin to understand now things which have puzzled me of late, but the police need not search any more, as I shall go to the village and yield myself to the law. I have no fear. I am innocent of any crime. Can *you* say that, James Courthope? And do not dream that because Robert is dead, and I — discarded — forgotten — so soon, you are free to marry the woman for whom two such men were willing to give their heart's blood. That infamy shall never be. I, Philip Warren, outcast and disgraced though I be, pledge myself to that new vow, and I have never yet gone back on my word."

"Though you killed Robert Courthope and shall be hanged for it, I agree with you in that," came Hannah's shrill voice from the door.

In their tense excitement, and because they were now almost in the dark, none of them had noticed the advent of Hannah. Indeed, she had crept up and listened at first, having followed Marjorie with the skill and secrecy of a prowling fox. She had arrived too late to hear the impassioned avowal of Courthope's love, but her fierce resentment of the innuendo in Philip's stinging outburst led her to break in upon them like a thunder-cloud.

By this time, Courthope was prepared for any emergency. Had his cousin's specter risen through the floor to rebuke him he would have faced the wraith undaunted. He sprang towards Hannah, and grasped her shoulder with a compelling hand.

"Not a word!" he hissed at her ear. "Leave this to me. You do not know what has happened. What better vengeance can you demand than that your sister's lover should be in a felon's cell? Take Marjorie home,

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and let me prevail on Warren to come to the village. You hear me? See that you obey!"

His immense energy conquered her. Spiteful, suspicious, fiercely determined though she was to maintain her hardly won rights as his affianced wife, she was overborne not only by his imperious manner, but by the dim horror of a half-comprehended tragedy.

Sullenly yielding to his will, she approached Marjorie and lifted her from the rough stones.

"Come," she said, with some show of sympathy. "Come home, girl. This is no place for you."

"Philip, dear Philip, will you not listen to me? One word, for the love of Heaven, for the sake of the love you plighted to me on that night —"

But Marjorie's beseeching fell on palsied ears, and James Courthope cried again:

"Home! Take her home, I tell you!"

So Marjorie was led away, crying her heart out, because the sky had fallen on her and she was crushed utterly. Philip saw her go, and with her went the last gleam of light out of his life, too, for in the worst pangs of his lonely despair there had ever been a gleam of joy in the thought that Marjorie would mourn, though she might condemn his seeming faithlessness. And now it was Marjorie who was faithless! He little recked what the future had in store for him. He was a man withered by the blast.

James Courthope murmured softly at his shoulder: "Pull yourself together, Warren. Perhaps things are not so bad as they look. Take my advice, and come with me —"

Philip turned on him.

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"May the Lord strengthen me and keep my hands clean," he cried, his rage nearly mastering him, "but if you do not leave me I shall strangle you where you stand."

"Oh, very well," was Courthope's amiable response. "I only wished to do you a good turn. If you refuse my help, that is not my fault. This is the second time. Had you taken my advice you would never have met Robert in Lancault. So, good-by, Warren. *Au revoir, sans adieux!*"

He strode off in the darkness. Philip heard him whistling an air from a popular opera as he crossed the moor towards the court, taking a short cut which would lead him away from the path followed by the two sisters.

Philip stood at the door, gazing out over the somber moorland. The last red bars of day were visible beyond the deep blue of the western horizon. It was a peaceful night, for the wind had gone down with the sun, and there was a hint of frost in the air. And his mood was strangely akin to the mood of nature. He was hushed, melancholy, with an aspect of exhaustion after a storm.

He remained there a long time, with mind and brain quite blank, conscious only of a numb pain at his heart, when suddenly he became aware of a curious chinking sound on the other side of the tower. It seemed to ascend and then it ceased, but instantly he heard a further movement on the roof.

A match was struck, and some person, walking with a firm, sure tread, came down the upper flight of steps within. Then Philip saw a bullet-headed, strongly built man appear through the lower trap-door. The man was carrying a wax taper, and smoking a cigar which had been recently lighted.

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Philip's amazement shocked him into ordinary speech.

"Well, sir," he said, "and who the devil are you?"

"I am Detective-Inspector Webster, of Scotland Yard," was the astounding reply. "It's deuced cold up there, and I was unwilling to wait all night. Will you walk with me towards the village? And have a cigar! It will do you good."

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE UNFORESEEN

PHILIP was brave, but the bravest may tremble when the law stretches forth its hand. Philip was in doubt, too, because the statement that Robert Courthope was dead had sown a poisonous seed in his heart. None knew better than he how secret and mortal had been their strife. He remembered Courthope's panting distress when blind chance had left him victor. What if wounds inflicted in the dark had combined with sheer exhaustion to rob him of life? If that were so, the law would hold his adversary guilty of murder; so Philip Warren felt as a hunted animal feels. For an instant the strongest passion of all gleamed in his eyes. The fierce energy of youth surged up within him. If this stranger embodied the law, let the law prove its right to crush its victim.

The detective, holding the wax taper aloft, knew that look when he saw it. Whether it came from the last madness of crime or the last despair of honest men it took the same form.

"You ought to be told," he said quietly, "that I could have arrested you at any hour during the past ten days, Mr. Warren. It may also save you some heart-burning if I add that I have only to shout for assistance and two policemen will help me to overpower you."

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"Am I under arrest?"

"In a sense, yes. A coroner's warrant charges you with the 'wilful murder' of Robert Courthope. I must warn you —"

"That anything I say will be taken down in writing, and may be given in evidence against me. I know the formula. I heard it used in the case of a poor wretch who pilfered some of my uncle's silver. Well, I surrender."

"That's better. Now, as to the cigar?"

"You are a polite executioner, to say the least. Yes, thank you, I will take it."

Philip thought that all sentiment had gone from him. The wild impulse towards freedom passed as suddenly as it arose. Marjorie was untrue, so let misfortune do its worst, but let it be speedy — that was all he craved.

"No, not the taper," said Webster. "There is a wooden match. Wax gives such a nasty taste to tobacco."

Philip almost smiled. The new order of detective at Scotland Yard was outside his ken. The light of the match was full on his face when Webster asked abruptly,

"If you are such an expert with the rapier, Mr. Warren, why did you leave your weapon firmly wedged in your opponent's body?"

Philip was genuinely startled. The cigar-lighting stopped.

"You say that which is meaningless in my ears," he cried. "Of course, you do not know what happened, but at the close of the fight I was disarmed, and Courthope's sword was at my breast."

"Was that how he wrung from you a promise to go away for five years?"

"No; that was our prior bond. Fool that I was, I

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agreed to fight, being sure of beating him. I might have wounded, but I would never have killed him. If any one plunged a foil into Courthope it was not I. Thank God you spoke those words! I was afraid — Courthope — might have died from shock. ‘Firmly wedged in his body,’ did you say? How could that be? We were alone. None knew of our meeting. Ah! One man may have known! *One* man! I threw Courthope down in my rage and grief. I threw him down with my naked hands. I wanted him to kill me, and he refused. He fell on his back. Oh, for Heaven’s sake say that he did not fall on my sword!”

“He was stabbed through breast and heart. He was found lying on his back, and the rapier was planted there as though to pin him to the ground.”

“Then I am innocent! Howsoever black may be the outlook of my wasted life, I am innocent!”

“If I had not thought so, Mr. Warren, I should now be in London and you in Nutworth prison.”

“You! Thought so! Then you suspect —”

“Sh-s-s-h! You are as bad as Miss Marjorie, whom, by the way, you treated extraordinarily badly when you interrupted Mr. James Courthope’s love-making a little while ago.”

“She, at least, has nothing to do with this affair.”

“Nothing to do with it! By Jove, if ever a woman was up to her neck in every turn and twist of a first-rate tragedy, Miss Marjorie Neyland is that woman. Talk about a Drury Lane heroine.”

“I mean, of course, that she was in no way responsible for the killing of Robert Courthope, so I pray you do not distress me needlessly by mentioning her name.”



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"Exactly. You will suffer in silence, like what's-his-name in Tennyson's poem. Oh, I remember. Geraint, he was called. Tell you what, Mr. Warren, you ought to be turned loose in a forest, in a cast-iron suit, there to strike dead every man you met, all for the sake of some fair lady pent in donjon keep. You are born too late. This is the twentieth century, not the twelfth. By the way, you want another match."

"I want to tell you, Mr. —"

"Webster — easy name."

"Well, Mr. Webster, you had best realize that under no circumstances shall I discuss my relations with Miss Marjorie Neyland. Your appreciation of that fact will spare you the exercise of your wit and me some display of rudeness."

"Ha, ha!" laughed the detective. "I guessed it. Just touch our knight and you hear the armor ring. Sorry, but you've got to learn a lot about that young lady. Shouldn't be surprised if you had to go on your knees and beg her pardon. Anyhow, it is cold talking here. We will just step out towards the vicarage."

"You are unfortunate in your choice of topics," broke in Philip. "That is another matter wherein I am unable to help you. I cannot meet my uncle."

"Some men would lose their temper with you, Mr. Warren; it would be the simplest thing in the world to let you hang yourself on the third Tuesday after next assizes. But I have no manner of doubt you are a very decent fellow, or a girl like Miss Marjorie would not sacrifice herself for your sake. Now, please, attend to what I am telling you, or I shall begin to be impatient. Miss Neyland was *acting* to-night, but James Courthope was in grim

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earnest. He wrote her a letter, making an appointment in this very tower. She sent me that letter, to obtain my assistance. Poor young lady! She is crying her heart out now, I suppose, because you distrusted her."

"Great Heavens, man, are you speaking truly?"

"A queer question! But let it pass. In the second place —"

"Let me go to her. I implore you, let me have one word, one look! You yourself said I should go on my knees."

"I have no doubt you will make amends in due course, but not to-night, Mr. Warren. I can't have all Hudston running at your heels, and a number of thick-headed magistrates asking why I did not arrest you in the ordinary way. This case is in my hands, and I mean to conduct it on my own lines. I am beginning to understand it at last, though I own you puzzled me by your continued hiding. And let me remind you, Sir Knight, that you have surrendered. You are bound in honor not to escape."

The hint was not given without cause. Philip had another frenzied inspiration to run, not for his own sake, but for Marjorie's. He groaned, and passed a hand over his eyes. Yet in his new sorrow there was a wealth of gladness. He could not choose but trust this strange informant. Marjorie was true! He had believed in her as in an angel, yet, at the first twinge of doubt, he had condemned her as base and unutterably false. How atone? How obliterate those tears of agony? Dear, suffering Marjorie! Had she not knelt to him, supplicated with streaming eyes and quivering lips? Why should some kink in the chain of fate ever tighten its folds when

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there seemed to be good reason for its loosening? Poor Philip! He was, indeed, a man to be pitied. There was a note of sympathy in the detective's voice as he continued:

"Now, Mr. Warren, pull yourself together. Above all things I demand your clear, full, unhesitating confidence and support. And it must be immediate. A wrong move now may lead to untold blunders. At least spare me any more argument drawn from the age of chivalry. Your uncle has publicly apologized for his treatment of you when you came home on that night of all mischief. He is now Miss Marjorie's best friend. Mr. Isambard is a strong man, and he does not do things by halves. There is only one thing that will delight him more than your reappearance, and that is the discovery of the man who killed Robert Courthope."

"I am ready," said Philip, exercising the utmost self-restraint in deference to this masterful counselor.

"Not quite; you want another match. And kindly step inside the tower until I dismiss my bodyguard."

Philip obeyed, with a new-born meekness. The detective whistled twice; two men came from the heather, and were told to await him in the village. After a brief pause, he called Philip, and the pair took the path by the glen—that which Marjorie had followed in her upward journey.

Those few minutes of quiet thought had worked wonders in Philip's troubled brain. He had marshaled his forces, reasoned himself into passivity. Marjorie would surely listen to him. In the very depth of his scorn he would find for her proof of his immeasurable love. He would show her how to gage his devotion by his anguish when

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he believed she was doubly lost to him. As for judge and jury, he gave no manner of heed to them. He was guiltless of his one-time friend's death; he knew it, and he would demonstrate it to all the world.

It was well for Philip in an hour so pregnant with doom that he took this optimist view. It might yet be Webster's task to rivet the fetters of evidence on him, and Webster was well aware of that element in the extraordinary relations existing between them.

"I am glad to observe that you are in a more rational frame of mind," began the detective, as they strode down through the bracken.

"Do you deduce that undoubted fact from my silence?" asked Philip.

"No. If merely silent you might be contriving a plausible tale. I depend solely on half an inch of ash on the end of your cigar."

Then Philip laughed, with some of the boyish merri-ment which he deemed lost beyond recall.

"You are a Socratic philosopher, Mr. Webster," he said.

"If that means that I regard one man as very like another when in trouble, I agree with you. At any rate, you admit I was right."

"Yes, indeed. I was pondering many things. May I ask you some questions?"

"As many as you like."

Philip could not see the gleam of amusement in his companion's eyes. Webster wished him to talk. No matter what he said, he would be giving information.

"Well, then, when did you enter Fennell's Tower to-day?"

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"At five o'clock precisely."

"Did you fly?"

"No, Mr. Warren. My wings have not grown yet. When I heard Miss Marjorie approaching the door, I knew that Courthope would be agog for her coming, that you must have long since discovered his presence, and that she would be trembling at her own daring. So the odds were greatly in my favor, and I pulled down a burglar's ladder which I fixed to the roof while you were in Lancault churchyard three nights ago, though I little thought then that I would use it under such conditions."

"Marvelous! But I might have found it there!"

"What! Show yourself against the sky-line in daylight, when you wished to remain undiscovered? I gave you credit for more sense than that."

"Then you heard nearly all that passed beneath?"

"I had to wait and take off my boots; but I did not miss much. I take it that Courthope tried to soothe his visitor's agitation at first. He did it very well, too. It is a pity. That chap has qualities."

"What do you mean?"

"Eh? Beg pardon. I never state opinions, I deal in facts only. That was a slip."

"But you were good enough to express the opinion that it was not I who killed my unfortunate friend?"

"I deal in two kinds of facts, Mr. Warren. The one set I state in court, the other I usually retain in my own storehouse. What I really meant was that, for a man who had knowingly committed a murder — you will note I say 'knowingly' — because killing a man in a duel is plain murder in England — you went about securing your safety in a fashion which would not commend itself to a

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ten-year-old boy. That hiding of the second rapier, for instance, and the stuffing of a blood-stained handkerchief behind the notice-board."

Philip stopped short. The lightness had gone from his voice when he interrupted:

"You are far too shrewd to tell me these things if you believe my statement that Courthope disarmed me. Are you seeking to trap me into some admission, Mr. Webster?"

"By gad, you're a terror. Beyond a few disjointed remarks, mostly explaining your high and mighty limitations, you have told me nothing. I hope to get an intelligible story from you after two or three hours of careful note-taking, and, to save time, I have pages of questions jotted down in readiness. But 'trap' is an ugly word, Mr. Warren."

"I withdraw it, and beg your pardon. My excuse is that I am groping blindly in a maze."

"Oh, that's all right. Fire away with your catechism."

Nevertheless, the man from Scotland Yard kept watch over his tongue, which was apt to follow a device that seldom fails when a criminal is discussing his crime. Twice already, in their brief conversation, had he tried to catch Philip unawares.

"Well, you are telling me why you thought — what shall I say — that I was curiously unconcerned about my safety, presuming I were guilty of Courthope's death."

"Yes, put it that way. You see, there were two places peculiarly bound up with this affair, Fennell's Tower and Lancault churchyard. Yet you live in the one, and visit the other each night! And David Thompson, your devoted worshiper and huntsman of your pack of otter

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hounds, saunters to the tower each day, carrying a can of milk and a full basket, yet returns swinging both empty. Really, it was too easy, Mr. Warren."

"Poor, loyal David! Does he, too, think I planted that sword in a stormy heart?"

"I suppose so. He believes you are hiding from the police. It was pitiful to see him trying to locate me before he set off for the tower."

"Yet he said never a word! All I got from him was 'They'll never know where you are, Mr. Philip.' I trust no harm will come to him for his stanchness. I have sat on the bench with my uncle often enough to imbibe some smattering of law. If there is a coroner's warrant for my arrest I must stand my trial, and David would be 'an accessory after the event.' That is, if you were to cast your net so wide."

"David will be left severely alone, though I promise myself a few minutes' fun when I tell him to-morrow morning that you have left the tower, so he need not bring his daily supply of provisions."

"Thank you. When may I — endeavor to see Miss Marjorie Neyland?"

"To-morrow, I hope."

"Will it be impossible to-night?"

"Yes, I fear so. Let me explain. Her sister has some strange hold over James Courthope. Hannah Neyland hates you and Miss Marjorie in the most fiendish way imaginable. She is now torn by conflicting emotions, joy at your imminent capture, rage at Courthope's avowed affection for the other girl, mixed pride and jealous love where Courthope and her own future are concerned. She may bubble over when so many passions are seething in

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the pot, but the slightest hint of your possible innocence and the resultant triumph of Marjorie would stop her tongue and send her hot-foot to Courthope for advice. I will endeavor to see Miss Marjorie myself to-night, and it will be an odd thing if I don't manage to dry her tears by some consoling message. Be easy on that score, Mr. Warren. But I must have a clear field during the next few hours. And now, I have said a good deal more than I counted on. Here we are at the vicarage. Let me announce you. Above all things, treat Mr. Isambard gently. He has aged as many years as he has lived days since you saw him last."

Webster was anxious that few or none of the vicarage servants should know of Philip's return, so the two men entered by a wicket gate which led through the shrubbery. The detective went on alone, and asked to see the vicar, who was at home, and Warren waited a moment in the shadow of the trees, whence, across the intervening gardens and meadow-land, he could see the windows of the Greyhound Hotel.

Marjorie's bedroom was situated in the front of the building; it was therefore invisible from his present standpoint, but there seemed to be some animation of lights in the back part of the house. Had Philip or the detective read their significance aright, it is probable that Hudston would have been spared some of the thrills it was destined yet to feel ere Robert Courthope's tomb saw its first border of spring flowers. But lights in the upper floors of a big country hotel are not prone to carry occult messages to their observers, and Philip's mind was quickly drawn from them when the French windows of the library opened in the darkness, and his uncle, bare-headed, white-



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faced, with hands outstretched, came towards him across the lawn.

For the first time in their lives, those two were knit by a bond of sympathy never again to be relaxed. The cleric, cold, unbending, broadly dogmatic, felt that he had never striven to understand his romantic-souled nephew, while Philip was regretting that he had not tried to accommodate his high-flown theories of existence to the world in which he and all other men had to dwell.

They clasped hands with a little murmur of joy that they were met once more in friendliness. Within the library, with blinds drawn and lights on, it was easy to see that the younger man had suffered hardships. He laughingly explained that he had borrowed a shirt from David Thompson, while he depended on the rain and dew for washing.

"But why not trust some one, my dear boy?" asked the vicar. "If not me," he added pathetically, "you might have sent a message to Marjorie, or even to Davenport."

"I'll tell you all about it, uncle, if you give me fifteen minutes' grace, the run of the bathroom and some clean clothes. I suppose Davenport can be warned that I am here?" he added, glancing at Webster.

"Yes. He will hold his tongue, I guess. And what about eating? Some sandwiches and a glass of wine, if I may partake of your hospitality, Mr. Isambard."

The vicar promised cheerfully that all would be done. Within five minutes Philip, reveling in a hot bath, heard a tap at the door, and the butler's eager whisper:

"Here's the clothes you want, Mr. Philip, an' thank God you've come 'ome. Shall I put a fire in your room?"

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"No, thanks, Davenport. That won't be necessary. And be sure that I, too, am glad to be home again."

But the butler's question set him thinking. Would he sleep in the vicarage or in the village lockup? Webster had been discreetly vague in some respects.

Behold, then, a wonderfully rejuvenated Philip, and a vicar from whose face the anxious lines were vanishing with each succeeding moment, seated with Inspector Webster in the cozy library, where Philip, as is the failing of every human being, told his tale backwards, beginning with his trials and tribulations in Fennell's Tower and ending with the real kernel of all the trouble, the duel and its causes.

Hence, he soon learned that Marjorie had recovered his ring from Felix, only to have it stolen by Hannah, and he gave little heed to Mr. Webster's expression of blank amazement that a man should live the life of a cold and hungry outcast during a fortnight simply for the sake of a heraldic ring.

"I knew I was doomed when I lost it," said Philip, "and now I know it is coming back to me, because my evil fortunes are turning, and their reaction will be seen when I have the ring once more on my finger. I simply could not tear myself away from Hudston without it. I searched during the long hours of darkness in every nook and crevice of Lancault, and was nearly caught twice, first by some unknown man, who might have been you, Mr. Webster," whereat the detective nodded acquiescence, "and again by Marjorie, from whom I had to fly as though she were a witch."

"But why?" demanded the vicar, spreading his hands in surprise. "Why fly from her, of all women?"

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"She, of all women, was the one whom I had sworn neither to see nor speak to for five long years. One keeps an oath if one takes it, uncle, and I did not know until to-night that Robert Courthope was dead. So you see that I had no alternative but to hide, your door being closed on me, partly by my own pride and partly by misunderstanding."

Mr. Isambard smiled gently.

"You are more generous than Marjorie, Philip. She did not forgive so readily."

"You forget, uncle, that she was the most cruelly used of any of us. I had to drive her from my sight on our wedding eve, so to speak. That was bad enough. When there was added to her private woe the public degradation of Courthope's murder and the inquest, I wonder she bore the shame and sorrow so well."

"From what you say, and I believe every word of it, you could not have killed Courthope either wilfully or by accident," said the vicar. "It is evident, so far as human judgment can determine, that when you flung Courthope on his back on the slabs in the church, he was too spent to rise at once. You rushed away; he was at the very farthest bounds of exhaustion. While he was lying there, some one who had watched the duel, though unseen himself, leaped forward the instant you had gone, saw some movement which betokened life in the man on the ground, and made sure of his deadly hope by seizing your sword and plunging it into Courthope's breast."

"That certainly seems to be the only possible solution of the mystery. I have already uttered some suspicion, but Mr. Webster checked me, and as yet, of course, I am not in possession of all the known threads of evidence."

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"It is a maxim of common sense," said the vicar gravely, "that where a crime is committed, one should look to the quarter where benefit accrues from that crime."

"Good Heavens!" cried Philip, springing to his feet; "the only persons who benefited by Courthope's death were Marjorie and myself."

"Explain that, Mr. Warren," put in the detective instantly, though hitherto he had left the best part of the talk to uncle and nephew.

"What is there to explain? Courthope's death not only released me from my vow, but made Marjorie a rich heiress. I gave no attention to that latter issue, because I was sure that I could overcome Courthope without seriously injuring him."

Webster, displaying real excitement, rose also and caught Philip by the arm.

"What are you saying?" he asked in a tense voice. "How came it that Miss Neyland was to be an heiress?"

Philip pressed his hands to his forehead. "Let me think!" he gasped. "When poor Courthope forced me to fight — he said — that he saw clearly — that one or other of us must go under — and, if it were he who fell — Marjorie would be a rich woman — because that day he would make over to her all he possessed. Yes, that was it. Those are about his exact words. He said it was fair, that whoever won her should have the money with her. And Robert Courthope was no liar. He made a will that day, as sure as I am alive. Isn't it known? Has no one spoken of this thing? His solicitor, Bennett, of Nutworth, must be aware of it. And there were witnesses, too."

"By the Lord! That is the hold Hannah has on

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James Courthope," Webster almost shouted. "She was one of the witnesses and Bennett's clerk was another. I guessed there was some hanky-panky about that transfer of some small piece of land. Either it was a forgery, or Robert Courthope did not know. That is it, of course. The transfer was got up afterwards, as he must have read his own will. What a conspiracy! And how many people knew that Courthope would die that night? This is the biggest thing, I tell you."

## CHAPTER XIV

### WHEREIN MARJORIE ACTS ON IMPULSE

FROM that instant a new trend was given to their thoughts. Under lowered eyelids they looked at each other. The shadow of a terrible crime seemed to darken the room. It was as though the spirit of the red Squire had come from the grave to direct them towards the truth.

Webster was the first to regain some measure of calm. He laughed harshly, with a mirthless suggestion that he was ashamed of having allowed his feelings to conquer professional *sang froid*. Yet a nervous nibbling at his mustache, and the almost Quaker-like decorum with which he went back to his chair and produced a notebook, betrayed the severity of the restraint he was imposing on himself.

"Now, Mr. Warren," he said, in a staccato way, "we must set about our inquiry in real earnest. Thus far we have only dipped into your story, tasting it, extracting its strenuous bits, so to speak. With your help, I propose to go through it from A to Z. Take your time. Think of everything, and tell me all that has happened since the moment Felix brought the message that Miss Neyland wished you to keep an appointment for six o'clock at Fennell's Tower."

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The vicar moistened his dry lips with his tongue.

"This affair is serious enough already," he commented, "but your statement, Philip, introduces an element of criminality hitherto wanting. I am rejoiced, my dear boy, to find the cloud of suspicion lifting from off your shoulders, but I am sure you will be most careful not to permit your prejudice against —"

"Mr. Warren will merely speak of facts," broke in Webster sharply. "We do not know, nor greatly care, whither those facts may lead. That is for the law to decide."

"You have not forgotten that my nephew is virtually a prisoner?" asked Mr. Isambard, who, as a magistrate, knew something of legal procedure.

"I have already warned him," was the terse answer, and the detective felt that he had, perhaps, erred in allowing the precise-minded vicar to be present.

But Philip swept aside all doubts.

"I have nothing to conceal," he said, with quiet insistence. "My unhappy friend and rival did not die by my hand. Were it otherwise, I still should tell the truth, but, as I have been accused unjustly of a crime which I had actually resolved not to commit, it would be a mere fettering of Mr. Webster's inquiry were I to refuse to aid him to the fullest extent."

The detective, for all his power of self-control, was straining like a hound at the leash when the game is started.

To his manifest relief, Philip made good his words by giving a faithful record of events since Felix found him poring over a black-letter book in the summer-house at the foot of the vicarage garden.

### *Wherein Marjorie Acts on Impulse*

Webster, though he took copious notes, hardly ever checked the story by a question. Once, when Philip mentioned that Marjorie thought the half-witted messenger had been sent by Mr. Bennett, the solicitor, he asked why she formed that notion, and the answer was that Felix's description had suggested Bennett to her mind.

Again, Webster interrupted the recital in order to discover whether or not Robert Courthope had admitted that it was he who locked the tower door, and Warren was obliged to say that Courthope denied all knowledge of the key-turning which had such disastrous consequences. The detective insisted on the closest verbal accuracy in recounting the wild talk in the churchyard when the duel was arranged, and, for the first time, it dawned on Philip that he might have assumed too hastily that the Squire had played such a mean trick on Marjorie and himself.

The vicar, also, though his evidence seemed to connect Robert with the door-locking, was positive that nothing was said on the point when he met Courthope in the lane, and his face, too, assumed a deeper pallor as he recalled the cross-examination of James Courthope by Mr. Whitaker at the inquest. Every whiff of evidence blew in one direction. None named the suspect, yet each knew the others' thoughts.

But the Scotland Yard man allowed no side issues to divert his inquiry. He followed Philip's narrative with the closest attention until he heard how, in the semi-darkness caused by a passing cloud, Courthope had disarmed his adversary. Then he rose hastily.

"Do you promise to obey my instructions, Mr. Warren?" he demanded.



### *Three Men and a Maid*

"Yes, if possible."

Philip was rather surprised that the detective showed no interest in his subsequent adventures — how he had quitted the train at a junction, and walked back over the moors to hide in Fennell's Tower next day until after nightfall, hoping to find his ring at Lancault, and never abandoning that hope, though sorely beset by Marjorie's unexpected visits to the churchyard. He could have told how the devoted huntsman of his pack of otter hounds had fed him without question, placing loyalty to a master and friend above the demand of the law for a fugitive criminal, and he was longing to relieve his heart of the burthen placed on it by the amazing conversation between Marjorie and James Courthope.

Yet Mr. Winter wanted to hear none of this.

"You had better do exactly as I tell you," he repeated, moving towards the door. "Let no one from outside see you until I arrive in the morning, say about ten o'clock. I shall ask Mr. Isambard to take us in a closed carriage to the courthouse at Nutworth, where you will be charged on a minor count, and remanded on your uncle's bail; so you should be here again by noon, and I have little doubt, under the circumstances, that you will find Miss Marjorie Neyland awaiting you in this very room."

"Ah! if only —"

But the detective was gone. He left uncle and nephew to sit together during many hours and tell all that was to be told of the tragedy which had shocked a whole country-side. It was late when they retired. They did not know that Davenport had literally obeyed their orders, and sent away a dozen callers. Hudston was wide awake that night.

### *Wherein Marjorie Acts on Impulse*

When Webster reached the chilly gloom of the garden he stood, for a few seconds, to light a fresh cigar. Soon the end was in a furious glow, sure sign of active thought in that round head of his. The jerky whistle of a train announcing its departure from Hudston station reached his ears. It was the 9.30 P.M. mail to York and the South, and it brought to mind the sad picture of Marjorie waiting in the arcade outside the hotel, eager for a life of love and happiness, yet banned by the hand of her lover as the outcome of the duel.

"By gad!" thought Webster cheerfully, "what a meeting that will be to-morrow! Lucky dog, Warren, after all! This suffering will make a man of him. I think I brushed away the last of the cobwebs when I tackled him in the tower to-night. There's something lovable about the fellow, notwithstanding his nonsensical notions!"

Turning into the village street, he passed groups of gossiping men. Missing naught within his ken, he saw that they showed a reawakened interest in his movements.

"So," he growled, "Hannah has babbled. Of course, she was eager to win a little added notoriety. I suppose the other half of Hudston is spread out between here and Fennell's Tower. Confound the woman, what a shrew it is!"

Feeling no active good-will towards Hannah, therefore, he hurried to the Greyhound, and the first person he encountered there was Hannah herself, bustling about with some of her old-time energy. The appearance of the detective seemed to startle her.

"Lor'," she cried, "is that you? Haven't you heard the news?"

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"What news?" said he, gruffly, with a sudden resolve to "bluff" her, as the police say when they flurry an unwilling witness into truth-telling.

"Why, about Mr. Warren."

"And what of him?"

"It is all over the village that he is hiding in Fennell's Tower."

"Who says so?"

"I heard it. It is the talk of the place."

"Come, Miss Neyland, who told you? Have you forgotten?"

"Er — really —"

"What a dreadful thing it is to have a bad memory," he remarked, with a sarcastic sympathy which he was sure would annoy her.

"My memory is all right. Anyhow, my sister Marjorie knows, and she is not one to be mistaken where Warren is concerned."

Webster had not hitherto experienced Hannah's "lady of the manor" style. The curt allusion to "Warren" amused him.

"Did she see him there? Or does she believe all she hears, like yourself, Miss Neyland?"

"I don't understand you."

"You have always been ready to credit fairy tales where Fennell's Tower was concerned, you know."

Hannah drew back, a trifle perplexed. Webster was a man of the world, and his tone hitherto had invariably been most polite.

"You are speaking in riddles," she snapped, venomously, "but plain English is good enough for me. My sister saw and spoke to Mr. Warren in that very tower this

### *Wherein Marjorie Acts on Impulse*

very evening, and so sure was she, at any rate, of his presence, that she has gone away from Hudston for ever."

"Gone away!" repeated Mr. Webster blankly. For once, he was quite taken aback. Hannah, pressing home an unexpected triumph, raised her voice a little.

"Yes, absolutely gone, sir. She left by the 9.30, and I, for one, think she is well out of it."

"Do you know where she has gone to?" he asked unguardedly.

Hannah smiled. She was given the opening she wanted

"I might guess," she tittered, "but you see I'm so ready to believe all I hear that I had better say nothing more."

To his credit be it recorded, Webster was concerned with Philip Warren's grief of the morrow rather than Hannah's present victory. But stress of thought never controlled his tongue or his face. He met Hannah's simper quite genially.

"Capital!" he said. "Now, if Mr. Warren is really in the tower, and you could manage to find that ring of his — the one your sister lost, you know — and give it to him, he might follow her, and several most interesting people would be made happy."

"Ring! What ring?" And Hannah became shrewish again.

"Haven't you heard? I made sure Miss Marjorie would have told you. A plain, gold ring, with a seal —"

"Oh, that? Yes, I heard some fuss. But what nonsense you talk. Mr. Warren will be caught, and tried for murder, unless you policemen bungle again."

"You never can tell. It's the queerest world, Miss Neyland. You are judging by the coroner's inquest, of

### *Three Men and a Maid*

course, but affairs might assume a very different aspect in a court of law. The law is an ass, you know, and I admit that we policemen do often bungle."

"What a funny sort of detective you must be! If Mr. Warren didn't kill the Squire, who did?"

"That is a question I cannot answer. Suppose you put it to the better-informed person who told you Mr. Warren was in the tower, for instance. Then you might hear a good guess, if nothing more."

"I don't know what you're driving at," was Hannah's weak retort as she retreated. For once, the wisdom of curbing her tongue became apparent. Webster gave her no further heed just then. He searched for Jonas, and found the innkeeper in the smoking-room, where some of the prominent people in the village had gathered. Jonas was purple with anxiety and success. The poor man had not only discovered that his almost unknown daughter had crept into his heart, but Hudston was drinking fabulous quantities of liquor under the stimulation of the Squire's murder. So, not an unusual event with him, he was pulled two ways.

"Well, sir, hev ye got him?" was the query which assailed the detective from a dozen throats.

"Yes," said he. "I suppose you mean Mr. Philip Warren?"

"Who else?" gasped one.

"I might have had an eye on you," was the jocular reply, and every villager laughed.

"I don't say as I'm much of an angel," said the other man, "but I've had nowt to do wi' the Squire's killing, I can take my solemn davy."

"And that is more than Mr. Warren can say, eh?"

## *Wherein Marjorie Acts on Impulse*

"Well, things do look black agin him, sir."

"Yet many a man has been innocent of wrong-doing who had a harder case to explain. Mr. Neyland, one word in your ear."

The canny Yorkshire folk looked at each other knowingly when the pair quitted the room. They could take a hint, these shrewd-eyed men, and their wits were busy to discover why the clever London detective should almost tell them plainly that perhaps the law might seek elsewhere than in Fennell's Tower for the slayer of Robert Courthope.

In the porch Webster was speaking in guarded tones to Jonas.

"Where has Miss Marjorie gone?" he asked.

"To Lunnon. Her mother an' me couldn't hold her. Her fool of an aunt —" here Jonas looked around to make sure Aunt Margaret was not within ear-shot — "her fool of an aunt gev her fifty pounds, an' away she's gone, never to come back. What'll become of the business?"

"Business seems to be all right for the time being, Mr. Neyland. Did your younger daughter say why she was going?"

"Not a word! She just came in wi' Hannah, went cryin' to her aunt, packed some things, cried a bit more, told her mother an' me not to ax her anything, 'cause she couldn't tell us if we did, and off she popped. Damme, she was gone before I fairly knew wot was happening. Wi' fifty pounds, an' all."

Neyland did not choose the living word, but the detective caught the sob in the man's voice. The despairing father was wondering, in dumb agony, why his child

### *Three Men and a Maid*

denied him her confidence, and Webster did a kindly thing when he said:

"Cheer up, Mr. Neyland. Keep my opinion a secret, but Marjorie will be back in Hudston within a week, and you will see her a happy woman. That is all you want, I expect?"

"Why, yes, sir, an' bless you for them words. May I tell her mother you said 'em?"

"No. Give that as your own view, and stick to it, no matter what happens. Just laugh, and bid people hail you as a prophet in seven days. Do you know Miss Marjorie's address in London?"

"If it's the old place, it'll be Turner's Studios, Finchley Road, sir."

As Webster strode off towards the Hudston police station, it was in his mind to telegraph to Malton or York and advise Marjorie to return. But he abandoned the idea.

"Let Hannah tighten the reins," he thought. "James is a horse of mettle and he will begin to prance. I shouldn't be surprised if he, too, goes to London. Well, let him. I can handle him more easily there than here. I am sorry for my romantic Philip, but I'm a detective, not a writer of novelettes, and unless I force James or Hannah to make a false move I can no more get the necessary evidence that I can fly. What I really want now is a trustworthy burglar, who would ransack Mr. Bennett's safe for me. What would he find there, I wonder!"

His subsequent proceedings that night were peculiar. After bidding the local police disperse the villagers to bed by spreading the news that Philip Warren was under arrest, he went to the inn where he lodged, wrote several

### *Wherein Marjorie Acts on Impulse*

brief letters, posted them, built up a good fire, obtained a fresh supply of cigars, and locked the door of his sitting-room. Then he took from a drawer a rough map of Hudston, embracing Fennell's Tower, Netherend Hill, Edenhurst Court, and Lancault. On the map he staged a number of small leaden figures, types of soldiers and army nurses which had served many purposes in their day. For these were Webster's puppets when he tried to reconstruct a crime, and every little mannikin had been labeled with names famous in the annals of Scotland Yard. Their present titles were familiar enough. Each leaden base was gummed to a piece of cardboard, on which was written "Philip," or "Robert," or "Marjorie," or "James," or "Hannah," as the case might be.

No actor in the Hudston drama was too insignificant to be disguised under the generic classification of the mere dramatist. Here were no "villagers, constables, servants, and others." Every individual who had the remotest connection with the death of Robert Courthope was neatly ticketed with his or her Christian name. There were no surnames. That was a peculiarity of the detective's method. He pretended, even to himself, that he suspected all or none until he had brought home the guilt to one or more persons, so he refused to libel any one by giving a name in full. An artist in such matters, he carried verisimilitude to its utmost limits. Round the neck of a bold trooper of dragoons, not yet brought into the cast of Webster's latest production, was tightly tied a small piece of whip-cord.

"Hello!" he muttered, "it is time I took your noose off, Monsieur Jacques. Quicklime in the Old Bailey has done you up long since."



### *Three Men and a Maid*

Monsieur Jacques happened to be a peculiarly atrocious murderer. But Webster followed the same formula whether the punishment was death or penal servitude. As soon as he had pounced on the offender, his or her leaden dummy was promptly garroted.

"The time," said the detective, altering the angle of the cigar between his teeth so that its smoke would not interfere with his view of the map, "the time is 9.15 P.M. on a certain Thursday in November. Allowing for a steady run from Lancault to Hudston railway-station, and granted that Warren had three minutes to spare in which to buy his ticket, at 9.15 he was vaulting over the boundary wall of Lancault."

"Philip," a hussar, brandishing a bent sword, was adjusted to that portion of the map where the high road passed the old church.

"At that instant, Robert Courthope, presumably alive and gasping for breath, was lying on his back inside the ruin," went on Webster, and "Robert," a glittering officer of the Blues, was placed *in situ*. The right arm, pointing a sword directly in front, looked odd as the figure lay prostrate on the broad sheet, but the dramatist, who had no eye for side effects, was already arranging other members of his troupee.

"How many people knew that Warren was in Lancault, and how many that Courthope meant to meet him there?" asked Webster. "James knew, and Hannah, and Marjorie, and Bennett, and Archibald, the groom, and Felix, the idiot. Some knew only of the one man's presence, others knew of both. James knew everything, because he rode like a madman to Nutworth to warn Bennett of Robert's intention to make the will which would dis-

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inherit him. What did those two precious rascals plan? They could not be sure of Robert's death, because accidents may happen, and an accident did happen in this case, whereby the better fencer was beaten. Moreover, there was almost a certainty that Warren would disarm, or merely wound, his opponent, in which event the will became of little present value. Hold on, though! Robert was a hard drinker. Did James think that grief and fury would kill him if the rapier failed? Obviously, the one man who, next to Warren, had a mortal interest in the fight was James. Come on, Jimmie! Hunt ball or no, you must have been peeping into Lancault at 9.15."

So "James," in the uniform of the Grenadier Guards, stood at attention behind the inner line of the ruined walls drawn on the map.

"Marjorie," went on the detective, "was waiting on the south side of the Greyhound," and a trim nurse, with a Red Cross badge on her arm, took up position in the alley.

"Where was Hannah? 'Helping to convey her sister's boxes to the station,' is her story. But the porter who took charge of them says that Hannah, with the two stable-men who carried the trunks, arrived there before eight o'clock. Did Hannah go home? By gad, has she a stronger hold on James than is supplied even by the suppressed will?"

Webster pondered this query a long time. Ultimately, he compromised the situation by stationing another army nurse on the cross-road between the Greyhound, the railway station, Lancault and Edenhurst Court. But her face was turned toward Lancault where her thoughts

### *Three Men and a Maid*

must have lain, as it was Hannah who sent Marjorie thither on the morning of the tragedy.

"Felix was in the village, Archibald was in the stables at the Court, and Bennett was at Nutworth. Being a lawyer, Bennett took mighty good care to be able to prove an alibi. He went out of his way to visit a client at the Feathers Inn, and have a needless chat about some trumpery law case. I wonder how much that clerk of his, Jeffry, knows of the will? Even a thick-headed squire like Robert would be aware that a will must be witnessed. So Jeffry was one witness and Hannah the other. Did they see what they were signing? At any rate, a lawyer's clerk would recognize the nature of the document. Probably he engrossed it. Jeffry, my friend, this may be a serious matter for you. You must have a statue."

Webster selected a gunner, and adjusted a fountain pen. Then he found, to his annoyance, that he did not know Jeffry's Christian name.

"Never mind," he said, "I'll christen him John. John Jeffry is a likely sort of name. It sounds honest, and your poor mother little thought she was fondling a rascal."

The detective opened his note-book, and read, very carefully, all he had written while Philip was talking in the vicarage. Next, he perused James's letter to Marjorie, asking her to meet him at the tower. He seemed to scrutinize each word, each twist and turn of the somewhat bold caligraphy, as if he would extract from the mere symbols the secret thought and intent of the writer.

At last, at a late hour, he put away the letter and gazed at the Grenadier Guardsman lurking behind the walls of Lancault. He picked up a bit of string and fingered

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it lovingly, but replaced it in the box where the toy soldiers were housed.

“Not yet,” he murmured softly, “not yet; I must learn first how James proposes to get rid of Hannah. If he sees a clear road, he must be a cleverer man than I. I can see no way, except one, and then I shall have to use two pieces of string on one neck. Will he dare?”

## CHAPTER XV

### A DAY OF SURPRISES

STARTLING events have a way of grouping themselves, just as colors, and numbers even, run in sequences during the spinning of a roulette-wheel.

It was no shock to Mr. Webster when a smart, young constable, unknown in Hudston — who, attired as a tramp, seemed to divide his time between the village street and its few public-houses — told him before seven o'clock next morning, that Miss Hannah Neyland had gone to Edenhurst Court late the previous night, and remained there nearly an hour.

But it created something of a sensation in the office of the magistrate's clerk at Nutworth when the Hon. and Rev. Oliver Isambard, accompanied by his nephew and the representative of Scotland Yard, entered and asked that a magistrate and the superintendent of police should be sent for instantly. There was more arching of eyebrows when the detective proposed that Philip Warren, a man for whom the hue and cry of "murder" was out, should be charged merely with "unlawfully engaging in a duel, contrary to the statutes therein made and provided," an offense not so serious that it should not be bailable.

## *A Day of Surprises*

The local superintendent, after a whispered colloquy with his distinguished colleague, offered no opposition, and Mr. Isambard was, of course, well known to his brother magistrate, so the suggested procedure was followed, Philip was remanded for a week, and bail bonds for his appearance were entered into by himself and his uncle.

Then Webster drew his "prisoner" aside.

"I did not wish you to look as if you had committed all the crimes in the calendar," he said, "so I did not tell you earlier that Miss Marjorie Neyland left Hudston last night for London. Steady, now! Don't get excited —" for Philip seemed to be ready to spring at him — "a train leaves Nutworth for London at 11.45, the young lady's address is Turner Studios, Finchley Road, and your uncle can procure here all the money you need. Go and find her, and bring her back to Hudston. Tell her I said she was to come. I left a note with Davenport bidding him send a portmanteau addressed to you at King's Cross. Now, haven't I behaved like a father?"

When the first fierce flood had quieted in Philip's veins he was ready enough to admit that his official enemy was a friend indeed. Yet it puzzled and troubled him that Marjorie should have flown. Was that proud heart broken? Would she ever forgive him?

Webster had foreseen all, forgotten nothing. To save Philip the chance of inconvenience at the hands of any one who recognized him (in a Yorkshire country district a man may have acquaintance within a radius of many miles) he was driven in a closed carriage to the railway-station at the last moment. He promised to telegraph that night, and say whether or not he had found Marjorie,

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while Webster undertook to reply at once if he had any further instructions to give.

So, quiet enough in demeanor, but all aglow with suppressed excitement, Philip withdrew into the cushioned seclusion of a first-class carriage, and passed out of the world which knew him. That is, he thought so.

But as he waited on the platform at York for the main line express, James Courthope saw him when the long train bustled in from the North.

James had listened to Hannah approvingly when she told how she had flouted the detective, and had informed her placidly that, so far as he was concerned, estate business at Darlington would take him away from Hudston and its worries for twenty-four hours. Knowing his Hannah, he took care to travel by the Darlington train, which left Hudston at ten o'clock. Hannah, by chance of course, happened to be at the station, and James exhibited proper surprise at her tidings, withheld the night before, of Marjorie's departure.

"I think," said James to himself, when the train started, toying thoughtfully with the pointed end of his short beard, "I think things are going right at last. But Hannah is a dreadful person. She ought to have her tongue cut out."

He changed into the London express at Darlington, still believing that things were going right, but he began to wonder if they were not going very wrong, when his amazed glance fell on Philip's distinguished and readily noted form standing among the York passengers.

For an instant he slunk back in his corner. Then, realizing that he must be sure of Philip's movements, he bounced from his seat and thrust head and shoulders

## *A Day of Surprises*

through the window. He was just in time to see Philip enter a carriage nearer the rear of the train. So his rival was going to London! The only intervening halt was at Grantham, and Warren was as likely to go to the moon as to Grantham. Therefore, Warren meant to join Marjorie. This well-dressed, self-possessed young man was not the unshaven, unkempt fugitive of Fennell's Tower. He had disappeared into a first-class carriage, too, so he had money, and he had come by the local line from Hudson quite openly.

Courthope's pink face grew somewhat livid. He strove now to recall each word that Hannah had said to him. What did that prying detective mean when he referred her for information to the "better-informed person," who told her Philip was in the tower?

"Will you have luncheon, sir?" said a voice behind him.

James started. His nerves were somewhat on edge, but he was a marvel at recovery, and he faced round on the attendant.

"No," he said, thinking he might meet Philip in the restaurant.

"By the way," he went on, "is the dining-car in front or behind?"

"Behind, sir."

"Ah." Philip would not pass along the corridor. "Bring me a brandy and soda and some biscuits, as soon as possible. If you are quick you will earn half a crown."

James had not to wait long for his refreshment. Then, to make sure, he drew the inner blinds, as he was alone, and gave himself seriously to think.

As usual, he was fastidiously dressed. A dandy always,



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the mourning he wore for Robert was in the height of fashion. He glanced at a portmanteau on the rack overhead, and was in a mind to open it, but forebore. Then he remembered that the attendant was a tall man, nearly his own height. He waited until the train had left Grantham — that was an admirable trait in his character, he could wait — and rang the electric bell.

The same steward came.

"By the way," said James, "do you go off duty when we reach London?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is beastly cold and damp in town, I suppose?"

"It was rather rotten, sir, when I kem away yesterday."

"Ah. Then you have a stout overcoat, and perhaps a cap, on the train?"

"Yes, sir." The man grinned, wondering what this pleasant-spoken gent was a-gettin' at.

"Well, you see this coat and hat of mine?"

"Why, yes, sir."

"If you will exchange your lot for mine, I shall give you two pounds into the bargain."

The grin faded, to be replaced by a glint of suspicion in the sharp Cockney eyes. Attendants on main line expresses encounter all sorts and conditions of men, and the request savored of anxiety to be disguised.

"Yes," said James, reading the open page of the man's face, "I wish to conceal my presence on the train from a person whose movements I mean to watch. That is all. I have offered you an excellent bargain. Of course, if it doesn't appeal to you, there is nothing more to be said."

His apparent lack of keenness for the deal acted like magic on the steward. The grin returned.

## *A Day of Surprises*

"D'ye really mean it, sir?" he asked.

"Here are my coat and hat — and the two sovereigns," said James, putting his hand in his pocket.

"I'll be back directly, sir. But — my togs are rather —"

"Bring them."

Thus it came about that few people would recognize the ultra-fastidious James Courthope in the seedy-looking person wrapped in a greenish-black, frayed overcoat, with the collar turned up, and wearing an old deer-stalker cap pulled down well over his brows, who rushed to secure a hansom at King's Cross, threw his bag inside, told the driver to wait, and then mixed with the throng of hurrying passengers.

Another man, whose only remarkable feature was a pair of very sharp eyes, was hastening up the line of waiting cabs and omnibuses. He seemed to be interested in the eager directions of passengers to drivers, and had a glance for labels on luggage, too. Hence, he saw the word "Hudston," the relic of some short journey in Yorkshire, on Courthope's portmanteau, and he also saw the letters "J. C." stamped on the leather. Then he took in the fact that the owner of the initials wore *verni* boots, trousers of good material and style, but a coat and cap that were monstrous in comparison. In fact, he would not have been Mr. Webster's most trusted subordinate if he missed any of these unimportant things.

"By gad!" said he, "that's odd," and his scrutiny of others ceased, all his attention being given to Courthope.

Hence, when James listened to Philip shouting to a cabman, far down the line, to drive him quickly to Turner Studios, in the Finchley Road, the stranger listened also. When James darted back to his own cab, which was better

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placed in the line than Philip's, and told the driver that if he reached Turner Studios, Finchley Road, in ten minutes under time, he would earn a sovereign, his shadow murmured affably:

"Things are about to happen in the Finchley Road. Guess I'd better move in that direction myself."

So he, going one better than James, ran out of the station, sprang into a motor-cab, and assured the driver that he might do some trick driving, having Scotland Yard, where the licenses come from, to back him up. The number of that motor was sent in next morning by four policemen on traffic duty, but the result was that Webster's deputy was posted outside Turner Studios many minutes before Courthope's cab dashed up.

The further outcome of a whirligig of events was that a policeman who happened to stroll that way became suddenly very attentive when the quiet-looking man signed to him not to be in a hurry.

When James Courthope arrived, the haste which marked his movements at King's Cross had gone. He was placidly smoking. He alighted, told his cabman to pull up at the next corner, and crossed the road, heading straight for the policeman. In fact, James had determined on a bold course, which might be expected of him. He had not previously known Marjorie's address in London, leaving it to be discovered by a trusted valet at Edenhurst. He expected to find it awaiting him at a West-end hotel, but Philip's presence in the same train had upset all his plans, and it seemed more than probable the girl was living in these studios, as he had a vague memory of Hannah's references to her sister's earlier residence in that part of London.

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If Philip met Marjorie there might be a joyous reconciliation. The mole-like burrowings of a fortnight, the extraordinary good fortune of the misunderstanding in the tower, would be undone. James smoked, pulled his Vandyke beard, and swore that this thing should not be.

He tackled the constable with his usual air of courteous superiority, trusting to his wits to overcome the effect of his outer garments.

"I suppose you have read of the Hudston murder?" he said. "You will remember that a Yorkshire gentleman named Robert Courthope was found dead in a ruined church, with a dueling-sword planted in his heart?"

"Y-yes," admitted the constable.

"Well, I am Robert Courthope's cousin. You will see that I am wearing a thin disguise," and James threw open his overcoat, revealing, even in the dim light of a lamp, that he was better dressed than was visible at a first glance.

"And what can I do for you, sir?" asked the other, in a tone that told James he had made good his opening. As a matter of fact, the policeman was wondering why the watching detective did not show any intent to join in the conversation.

"I am naturally interested in the capture of my cousin's murderer. Do you recall his name?"

"Yes, sir. A Mr. Warren — Philip Warren, that's it, a youngish man, kind of artist in style, well set up, walks with a long, free stride —"

"Exactly. You see that cab coming along the road? If it stops at Turner Studios, and a man of that description gets out, he is Philip Warren."

"You don't say!" exclaimed the policeman, stirred by

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visions of promotion, yet astounded that this prize should be left to his hands.

"I am quite sure of it. Most fortunately I found you here; otherwise, I should have been compelled to drive to the nearest police-station. But, as I prefer to remain out of the affair, don't take my word for it. Ask the man himself if he is not Philip Warren, and then form your own conclusions."

"By Jove!" muttered X 100, gazing covertly at his non-uniformed associate standing in the doorway of a neighboring house. So *that* explained the presence of the Scotland Yard official! *He* knew, too. Indeed, as Philip's cab drew near, the detective strolled towards them. Above all things it was important that X 100 should act promptly. The constant feud between the wearers of uniform and of plain clothes became a compelling spur. It was a glorious achievement to get ahead of the "Yard," though, in this instance, the "Yard" seemed to be complaisant. If he could arrest the man concerning whose extraordinary crime all London was talking a week ago, it would be a whole bunch of feathers in his cap.

Philip's cab was traveling fast, and there was not much time for reflection. James knew when to keep his mouth shut. He only added a murmur:

"I have your number, and I shall not forget the officer who secured that scoundrel, Warren."

That was sufficient. Philip stood upright on the foot-board, handed the cabman some silver, and jumped down, to be accosted by a policeman with the demand:

"Is your name Philip Warren?"

"Yes," he said.

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"Then I arrest you for the murder of Robert Courthope, at Hudston, in Yorkshire. Better come with me, quietly. Anything you may say —"

"Oh, go to the devil!" cried Philip, wrathfully indignant that this stupid constable should interfere with him at such a moment. X 100 seized him by the arm.

"If you resist —" he began, but, luckily for Philip, reason mastered just anger, or the policeman might have been surprised by the strength in those square wrists. Philip swallowed something.

"There is no use in explaining matters to you," he growled. "Take me to a superior officer. And you need not handcuff me," he added contemptuously. "You and I can go in this cab. Come on! Be quick! I am in a hurry."

X 100 had not met this type of desperado during his career in the force, but he sprang after Philip, bawled a direction to the amazed driver, and away went the cab.

James was not near enough to hear what passed. He expected to see a fight, was prepared even to witness the discomfiture of the policeman and its resultant excitement, and he marveled at the easy celerity with which he had attained his object.

He was puzzled, almost bewildered, but he was certain of one thing — Philip was safe in the hands of authority, and authority would not relax its grip without the best of reasons.

He drew a deep sigh of relief, and went to his waiting hansom, turning his head twice to watch the vanishing vehicle which held his rival.

"Take me to the Pall Mall Hotel," he said, "but stop

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at the first clothier's or second-hand clothes shop you come to."

The detective, passing at the right moment, caught the words. He, too, watched Courthope's cab until its twinkling red lights were dimmed by the gloom of London.

"Queer business!" he growled.

To reassure himself, he took a slip of paper from his pocket, and stooped in front of the motor's lamps.

"Philip Warren surrendered last night," he read. "I thought advisable prefer minor charge. Warren, remanded on bail this morning, has gone London, with my approval, to induce Marjorie Neyland, Turner Studios, Finchley Road, return with him to Hudston. James Courthope (see confidential report) probably gone there also. Meet trains King's Cross for Courthope. Watch, report daily by wire, but do not interfere."

That was a de-coded message from Webster, received at 2.30 P.M. The fast train which brought Philip and James to town arrived at 6.15. It was now seven o'clock.

"Do not interfere," mused the detective. "That means just what it says, or I don't know Webster."

And he weighed events fully ere he gave an order to the chauffeur, for he was vexed by the knowledge that X 100 was pluming himself.

Courthope, meanwhile, obtained a new coat and hat. Neither article was quite up to his ordinary standard, but they would suffice until next day, when the more important shops of the West End would be open. He found a telegram from his valet awaiting him at the hotel. The man had succeeded in obtaining Marjorie's address, and James now counted himself thrice fortunate in having seen Philip. There were many things he did not under-

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stand, and it was essential that they should be inquired into, but it needed no supreme intelligence to perceive that half an hour's talk between Philip and Marjorie might build a fortress of trust which James could not sap in half a lifetime.

Though hungry, he did not dine. He changed into evening dress, ordered one of the hotel's electric broughams, and was at the door of Marjorie's flat a few minutes before eight o'clock. He tried to repress the sense of triumph which thrilled his heart when an elderly charwoman said she would "see" if Miss Neyland was at home. In a tiny place consisting of a decent-sized room, split into five and a corridor by partitions, that statement has but one meaning, so James murmured that "a friend from Hudston" would be glad to have a word with Miss Neyland. The woman, made confident by his manner and attire, was about to show him into a small studio, when Marjorie herself appeared.

"You?" she gasped, and James's triumph was lessened a good deal by the sight of her wan cheeks and sorrow-laden eyes. He prided himself on rapidity, and coolness of judgment, and it was borne in on him now, even more forcibly than during that exciting episode in Fennell's Tower, that Marjorie was grievously wounded by the seeming loss of Philip Warren's love. A spice of malignant spite at once fermented the passion which pulsed in Courthope's breast. It nerved him to play his rôle rightly. Wild desire urged him to throw aside pretence, but cold reason whispered: "Be wary! Little more than twenty-four hours have passed since this coy maid was luring you to madness. Why, if she so loved Warren, was she ready to listen to you then?"



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So James bowed, in his well-bred way, and said softly: "Yes, it is I, Marjorie. Being in London, on whom should I pay my first call but on you?"

A whole world of distrust, almost of terror, held the girl spellbound. In Hudston, the simple environment of the village, the honest capaciousness of the Greyhound, the mere existence of father, mother, and aunt, constituted safeguards, but in London, and in this man's presence, she was "in a city that is broken down and without walls."

So they gazed at each other, each the prey of hidden tumult, and the serving-woman marveled what had come to her high-spirited young mistress, whose return to the little colony of artists in the Finchley Road she had hailed with delight.

But Marjorie had done with tears. The agony of a night and a day had wrung her soul to exhaustion. There remained the one fierce longing, the wish to prove to Philip that he had wronged her, and here, sent apparently by Providence, was the means of her justification. If she let Courthope see too plainly that she feared him, her frail bridge of hope would crumble at its very keystone. Though the words tasted bitter in her mouth she strove to utter a conventional welcome.

"It is very good of you to seek out my den, Mr. Courthope," she said, "but, of course, you have taken me by surprise. As I arrived in London only this morning, I scarce expected a visitor from Hudston so soon."

"That is just why I am here. If Horace lived to-day, he might tell us in well-turned Latin verse that six hours in a fast train may change the sky but not the mind."

It was a wholly commendable thing about James that

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he had the art of pouring oil on troubled waters. His agreeable smile and smooth flow of nonsense helped to restore Marjorie's wits. Even Mrs. Johnson, the charwoman, thought he was an uncommonly nice gentleman.

"Well, won't you go into the studio? You will find a fire there, and I will join you in a moment," said Marjorie.

"No," he answered. "I shall either call at a more reasonable hour to-morrow, or you shall agree to fall in with my present notion. I am starving for want of a meal, and I imagine that you have not dined yet. So what do you say to a comfortable dinner in a restaurant, where we can discuss at leisure? I have a motor waiting and I promise to bring you back about ten o'clock, as you must be tired after that journey."

"I am not dressed for ceremony."

"I am hungry enough to scoff at such a pretext."

"Then you will wait ten minutes?"

"Ah! Show me to the studio quickly, lest you lose a second."

"Or change my mind?"

"I should never make the mistake of thinking that you acted on impulse, Marjorie."

"Well — my feminine fickleness may survive this test. Mrs. Johnson, please take Mr. Courthope into the studio, and stir the fire."

Marjorie vanished. Well pleased with himself, James followed the charwoman, to whom he gave a handsome tip. Then, while he eyed the sketches in the place, studies made at an art school in Marylebone, he mentally surveyed the situation. How account for Marjorie's change of attitude? How for Philip's presence in London?

If he were discreet and sympathetic, he might be told.

### *Three Men and a Maid*

As Cuvier once reconstituted a new genus of animal out of a single fossil bone, so did Courthope trust to his intuition to deduce many facts from a slight basis.

A glance, a sigh, an avoidance of topics fraught with pain — each or all of these might supply unwritten folios.

And he had actually won so much ground that she did not resent the use of her Christian name! He kindled at that. Though sleek and wary, James was ready to befool himself for her sake. As Agar, the son of Jakeh, said to Ithiel and Ucal, many and many a century ago: "There are three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not: the way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man with a maid."

Yet the way of this man was seemingly plain to be seen, when Marjorie, gloved, hatted, and cloaked, altogether charming in face and figure, tripped into the studio with words sweet in his ears:

"I hope I have not exceeded my time limit. And, now that you have made me think of it, I believe I really do want something to eat."

## CHAPTER XVI

### WHEREIN MARJORIE RETURNS TO HUDSTON

MARJORIE'S flat was on the second floor. As they descended the high-pitched stone stairs they did not try to carry on a conversation. The place was dimly lighted, and it needed care to negotiate the radiating steps at each turn. Courthope, leading the way, halted at the first landing in order to feast his eyes on Marjorie's daintiness.

"Space is more precious here than at Hudston," he said. "I found it rather breathless work reaching your abode."

"No doubt," said a voice behind him. "'Long is the way, and hard, that out of hell leads up to light.'"

Marjorie screamed. Though not given to hysteria, she might well be pardoned the outburst. It was Philip Warren who spoke — a quite self-possessed and sedate Philip — because goblins which assume mortal shape are not usually so versed in Miltonic lore as to cap a commonplace remark with an apt quotation.

Something seemed to crack inside Courthope's head. There was a shrill singing in his ears. He was even less prepared than Marjorie for this apparition. But he was not a thorough-paced rascal without having the nerve and resource which successful rascality demands.

### *Three Men and a Maid*

"So you have escaped!" he cried, in a queer, cracked voice.

"No. That is what *you* are going to do now. Make good your opportunity, Courthope. You have not many hours."

James, never a coward, blazed into a red fury.

"Out of my way, you fool!" he cried. "Utter another word and I summon the police. Nay more, I shall hold you till they come."

"Not many words, Courthope, but sufficient. I have been taught wisdom by adversity. A detective waits below to rescue me from any further blundering inspired by your hatred. Nay, do not give me the joy of disabling you. That would be folly, man. You need your limbs for flight."

Marjorie, standing above them on the stairs, with one hand leaning against the wall and the other clutching her dress, was conscious of the return of his old-time confidence and buoyancy to her lover. Though momentarily bereft of the power of coherent speech, she knew that something of vast import had happened. Here was not the Philip who fled like a self-admitted criminal, nor the Philip of their latest meeting in the tower, but a man rejuvenated, ready to face the world in his careless cavalier way, and, above all else, ready to listen to her protests that he must not misjudge her.

She wondered why he did not look at her, but she, could not see Courthope's eyes, or she would have known that a penned cobra could not have glared at Philip with more of murderous venom. The plotter was foiled when victory seemed to be within his grasp. He was poised, wishful to spring, yet not daring to undergo certain defeat. And Philip recognized that look, and was watchful.

### *Wherein Marjorie Returns to Hudston*

So James wetted his dry lips with a quick-darting tongue, and tried bravado.

"It is not my business to arrest fugitive convicts," he hissed. "Yet you must stand aside. You are detaining Miss Neyland, as you see. I am glad to remember that you are a gentleman, so I leave your threats to a more suitable occasion."

Philip smiled, and Marjorie's heart throbbed to see how the spell of evil had passed wholly from his face.

"No good, Courthope," he answered quietly. "I am here to humble myself to the dust for having suspected Miss Neyland of deceit. That was stupid — a mere vowing that the sun was sullied because I gazed at it through darkened glasses. One does not make that mistake twice."

"I ask Miss Neyland herself to decide between us," cried James, feeling the morass yielding beneath him.

"My own pitiful weakness makes me decline her arbitrament unless she hears me first," broke in Philip, with a new note of anger in his voice, for he only dreaded Marjorie's just scorn.

"I have never doubted you for one moment, Philip dear," came a low, sweet murmur from the stairs. Then Courthope knew he had played a bold game and lost; but if Marjorie were actually Philip's wedded wife he would neither relinquish his pursuit of her nor cease to conspire against Philip. He drew himself up with a proud hauteur which well became him.

"Your word is law, to me even more than to Mr. Warren," he said. "I, at least, may claim to have shown constancy. If I leave you now, Marjorie, I go at your bidding. And I do not forget that you have twice made me welcome."

### *Three Men and a Maid*

He meant to stab, but the thrust glanced harmlessly off Philip's new armor. It did not come within the scope of a mind like Courthope's to understand the nobility of Philip's temperament. Those fanged words might have hurt another man. In Philip's ears they sounded like the snarl of a trapped animal. It was not for him to doubt Marjorie again, but to plead for forgiveness that he had doubted her at all.

So the whiff of resentment at Courthope's challenge fled, and James had the bitter consciousness, as he descended the next flight of stairs, that Marjorie was clasped in Philip's arms.

He stifled the oath on his lips. Of what avail to curse? Better gather his wits, and strike out some new and effective means of checkmating his rival. Passing into the street, he saw a man standing near the door. Then he remembered having seen the same man loitering near the cab when Philip was arrested. He resolved not to lose a second in beginning another campaign.

"Are you from Scotland Yard?" he demanded.

"Who are you that you should ask me that question?" was the reply, and James felt that this stranger was of different caliber to X 100.

"My name is James Courthope, and you, or your superiors, have set at liberty my cousin's murderer. No doubt you have your reasons, but they must be weighty to justify such a course, and I promise you that I shall use every means in my power to make you regret your action."

"We have our reasons, Mr. Courthope," was the polite answer, and with that James was perforce content. He slammed the door of his motor-brougham and was carried

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rapidly to his hotel. The detective rubbed his hands, the night being cold.

"I guess Webster knows what he is doing. Blest if I do," he murmured. Then, hearing Philip and Marjorie coming down-stairs, for good and bad alike must eat, he discreetly withdrew, merely raising his hat when Philip cried cheerily:

"I have routed the dragon. He snorted fire, but he has gone. And I am exceedingly obliged to you and Mr. Webster for what you have done."

A hansom is an excellent contrivance for lovers. It insists on a certain contiguity. Not even the shyest of young ladies can pretend that the resultant squeezing embarrasses her. And Marjorie was by no means shy during that blissful traverse of London's squares and streets, for Philip was piling Pelion on Ossa to prove to her that the more bitter had been his thoughts the more passionate his love.

At last they calmed sufficiently to ply each other with anxious queries, and Marjorie learnt what had happened since she left Hudston. Naturally, Philip was more eager to tell how he had tried to reach her than to go into the long story of his talk with Webster.

It seemed that when X 100 brought him to the nearest Metropolitan police-station, the inspector in charge was politely incredulous as to Philip's statement that he had been remanded on bail that very morning. He did, however, promise to communicate with Scotland Yard, seeing that Philip neither denied his identity nor sought to avoid arrest. He also questioned the constable when Philip insisted that the latter should reveal how he came to know the name of the occupant of one hansom out of the



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many passing through Finchley Road, and then the prisoner learnt, to his amazement, that James Courthope was in London. His annoyance and distress (on Marjorie's behalf) were so poignant that they served to strengthen the case against him, and he was, in police parlance, "detained in custody pending inquiries."

Fortunately, he had an unknown friend working for him. Webster's deputy found, to his surprise, that Hudson was on the Post-Office telephone system, a boon which it owed to a county main road passing that way. He went to an important sub-office, telegraphed to Webster, and said he would await a call at that office if made before eight o'clock.

The call came at 7.45. Webster said nice things to his *aide*, spoke most unjustly about X 100, and directed every effort to be made to secure Philip's release. If any departmental red tape prevented instant success in this vital matter, his assistant was to hie to Miss Neyland and tell her everything that had taken place.

Most happily, Philip himself was able to undertake that joyful task.

"But I have kept my most wonderful news to the last, sweetheart," he said, as their cab entered Regent Street and they neared the restaurant they had chosen for their first meal together.

"What, then, are there further marvels?" she asked, turning towards him a face from which sorrow had sped as a summer mist melts before the sun."

"My ring is restored."

"Oh, Philip, has Hannah relented? If so, I can forgive her much."

"I cannot imagine what has taken place, but Mr. Web-

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ster charged his deputy to inform me that Mrs. Richards, your excellent aunt, brought my ring to the vicarage this evening. My uncle recognized it instantly. She gave no explanation of possessing it. She simply said, 'Please let Marjorie know,' and went away."

"Dear, good Aunt Margaret!" cried Marjorie. "I feared it could not be Hannah's free act. Philip, my sister has been so unkind and bitter. It would seem that some malign influence descended on our little village that day when we — when we —"

"When we met in Elysium, otherwise known as Fennell's Tower? No, it was there already. Our meeting was part and parcel of a villainous scheme already calculated. We were puppets in the hands of a master craftsman. You must be prepared for a strange recital, Marjorie. To-day, during long hours in the train, I reviewed events in the new light given by Mr. Webster's and my uncle's statements, and I am appalled by the horrors through which we have wandered blindly. But there, sweetest, sufficient for to-morrow are the crimes of yesterday. Just now we are bidden to a banquet of the gods."

So Marjorie dined with the man of her choice, and the man in whose company she had started for the feast ate a solitary meal with affrighting thoughts as unbidden guests.

It is not to be wondered at if Philip forgot to telegraph to Hudston until long after official closing-time, nor that Marjorie's charwoman, whom she had retained for a week, should be overwhelmed with curiosity when an exceedingly radiant young lady came home, much later than ten o'clock, and took an affectionate farewell of a different young gentleman than the one with whom she had left Turner Studios three hours earlier.

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Be sure that Philip was there early enough to take his betrothed out to breakfast, and a mid-winter sun smiled kindly on them as their hansom scampered across London to that self-same restaurant. It was arranged between them that they should return to Hudston by the afternoon train from King's Cross, and it was a very ordinary coincidence, there being but two fast trains available daily, that James Courthope should see them hurrying along the platform like children on a holiday.

He, too, was going back to the North. Philip's slightly-veiled threats warned him that a mine might be fired which would hoist him to destruction, and its secret wires lay in Hudston. So James, flushed and pale alternately, sought in desperation what he could do to mar the happiness of the two young people, and his warped genius evolved a scheme which might, he thought, have unpleasant results. It must be remembered that he knew nothing of Philip's appearance before the Nutworth bench, so he sent telegrams from Grantham to three persons in Hudston whom he could trust as newsmongers:

"Philip Warren, accompanied by Marjorie Neyland, will arrive at Hudston by the 8.30 P.M. train from the south."

Philip, too, had announced their departure in messages to his uncle and the detective. Webster was about to stroll toward the vicarage, where he had arranged to meet Mr. Isambard, when he discovered hundreds of people — nearly every man, woman, and grown child in Hudston — pressing along the short road to the station.

The unusual gathering, at an hour when the village was mostly preparing for bed, excited his suspicion.

"What's up?" he asked, stopping a farmer whom he had met in the Greyhound.

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"Hevn't ye heerd?" came the cry. "Why, maister, that dare-all, Philip Warren, be a-comin' here frae Lunnon wi' Neyland's girl, as bould as brass."

Webster knew it was hopeless to think of dispelling that crowd of gapers with a denial. And he felt that an enemy had done this thing, because Philip's messages were unsigned, nor was Marjorie specially mentioned in them, so no babbling on the part of a telegraphist would explain it.

"James!" he muttered, viciously. "If I had time I would go now and tie a string round his neck. But what is his motive? Does he hope to force *my* hand? By gad, a dare-all is James, if you like."

But Webster acted while he growled. There was yet half an hour, assuming the train to be to time, which was seldom or never the case. He ran, and the outcome of his running was that Philip and Marjorie were surprised to be summoned from the train by Mr. Isambard at Fenthorne, the station before Hudston, while Webster smoked a soothing cigar on a crowded platform at Hudston.

In the darkness, Courthope had not noticed the Fenthorne development. Hence, if there be any species of joy in doing evil, he experienced that subtle emotion when he saw the Hudston station and its approaches packed by an unruly mob. None knew better than he that the hectoring, hard-riding Squire was dear to Hudston, and he counted, too, on some display of the dour Yorkshire spirit of righteousness, which regards an excursion to London as an act of license, and would be ready enough to deal harshly with such escapades as Marjorie had been guilty of.

He foresaw that the public condemnation of Marjorie

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would react on Philip. The police would be unprepared, and there was a chance of Philip's reception being actively hostile.

Indeed, James pictured himself rescuing Marjorie from a position of some danger, and, if this roseate fortune were denied him, there remained the certainty that next day's newspapers would bristle with conjectures as to the motive of the authorities in permitting a man suspected of a serious crime to be at large.

When the train drew up, after much whistling by the astounded engine-driver, James leaped forth quickly. He turned in the direction where he knew Marjorie and Philip had been seated on leaving York, but all he could discern was the appearance of the very small number of local passengers, and the surging of a horde of gapers up and down the narrow platform.

As the expected pair were at that moment comfortably ensconced in the vicar's carriage some three miles away, it was obvious that James looked for them in vain. An excited station-master appealed to the people to "stand clear," the engine snorted its warning, and the train rumbled away, leaving Hudston gazing blankly at itself, and Courthope gazing blankly at Hudston.

Then there came to him Hannah. Like all others, she was drawn by the lodestone of her sister's expected arrival.

"So you have come back from Darlington," she said, with a quiet restraint, foreign to her nature, and boding no good for James.

The mere sight of her seemed to rivet invisible fetters on his limbs.

"Yes." He answered carelessly. He was sick of dis-

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appointed spleen. If Hannah wished to quarrel he was ready to oblige her.

"You came a long way round," she went on, wondering what misfortune had befallen him.

"Yes," he said again.

"Are you ill, James?"

Her voice softened. He was the one human being she loved, and she had never before seen him so dejected, while he seemed to shrink from the jeering babel that surrounded them.

"Not ill, but tired. Have you seen any servant from the Hall? And why has this crowd gathered? Whom did they expect to meet that there should be such a gathering?"

Now, Hannah had been the prey of mad jealousy for two days and a night. She knew full well that Courthope had gone to London, and she would have followed him thither but for a timely hint from Webster that Philip would surely bring Marjorie to Hudston. Notwithstanding his manifest weariness, therefore, she yielded to wrath when he tried to make out that he was ignorant of any reason for a popular ferment.

"As if you didn't know!" she blazed forth, "you, who traveled in the very train she was supposed to come by. I believe you have some hand in her disappearance. Don't think you can humbug me, James. I won't stand it. I tell you now —"

"Oh, go away. You worry me. Hi! Archibald! Here's my bag. Is the carriage outside? See you tomorrow, Hannah. Sorry I must be off."

Thrusting right and left those who barred his passage, Courthope forced a path for himself, taking care that Hannah should not follow.

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Webster, though he could hear no word in the confusion, saw Hannah's face, and read it as an open book.

Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,  
Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.

Webster had no time for reading Comedies of the Restoration, yet he knew the sentiment if not the lines.

But he wished to learn what had taken place in London, so he, too, made his way out of the station, and was in the vicarage porch when the carriage drove up.

He found another visitor there before him. Davenport, the butler, was assuring poor Jonas Neyland that he had no news of Mr. Warren's or Miss Marjorie's whereabouts, which was the non-committal answer Davenport would have given to an archangel if questioned on his master's business. The detective came to the tortured innkeeper's aid. Jonas, for once, had let "the business" take care of itself. He, like the rest, had heard of his daughter's probable arrival by the 8.30 P.M. train. He could not face the boisterous mob, and he was too uneasy to remain at home, so, hoping the vicar might be able to give him some comfort, he stole away without even his wife's cognizance.

"If you wait here, Mr. Neyland," said Webster, "you will meet your daughter in a few minutes. And she will be glad to see you, because you can take her home when the village has quieted down for the night. Have you heard how it became noised abroad that she was traveling from London this afternoon?"

"Why, sir, some one telegraphed frae Grantham."

"From Grantham. Are you sure?"

"Sartin sure. I seed it. It was on't paper. 'Grantham, 4.5 P.M.' Mr. Smithers hisself showed it te me."

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"Any name of a sender?"

"Not a name. Just a short message about my girl an' Mr. Warren."

"And why should any one wire to a man like Smithers? Was it in the belief that the village barber would spread news quickly?"

"Happen you're right there, Mr. Webster, but I've bin so upset these last few days that I can't put two an' two together as I used to be able to do."

"Well, well, your daughter will soon be here."

"I'm main glad on it. But that's not all. Hev' ye heerd about that blessed ring?"

"Not the whole story. What was it?"

"It seems as how Marjorie got a ring from Felix which Mr. Warren lost during that dreadful affair in Lancault. Then Marjorie accused Hannah of stealing it from her, an' my sister-in-law — a most cantankerous woman, Mr. Webster, when she gets a thing into her head — took Marjorie's side, which she would do anyhow, for she fair worships that lass. Well, so far as I can larn, Aunt Margaret, as we all call her, was leanin' over the bannisters night afore last when she heerd you a-tellin' Hannah she ought to give back that ring —"

"The deuce she did!" broke in Webster. "The old lady caught me tripping, eh?"

"She said nowt aboot that, nor anything to anybody, but no sooner did Hannah gan out yesterday mornin' than Aunt Margaret goes rummagin' in her room, and dang me if Hannah has not bin sarchin' for that blessed ring everywhere, an' sayin' she is sure Aunt Margaret took it."

"Oh. Is that it? By gad, I must find a vacancy for the old lady on my staff. Well, here is the carriage, and



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I am very much mistaken if your younger daughter is not inside, Mr. Neyland."

Davenport threw open the door, and seemed to be somewhat scandalized to find the two men standing in the porch.

The vicar alighted, and Philip; and then Marjorie appeared. She was overjoyed to see her father waiting there, and she ran to his arms with a glad cry.

"Oh, dad! Have you come to meet me?"

"Eh, ma lass! Ma bonny lass!"

That was all he could say, but it sufficed. His eyes were dim with tears when she led him inside to the light and warmth, and, while she comforted him with loving assurance of her well-being, Philip drew his uncle and Webster apart.

"Can you tell me the hour when Mrs. Richards brought my ring here?" he asked.

"Yes," said the vicar, "it was 6.15 P.M."

"And I arrived in London at that very moment. No wonder my fortunes changed forthwith, though, indeed, I did not think so at seven o'clock."

"And you would not have thought so yet if I had not sent a man from the Yard to meet that train, Mr. Warren," put in Mr. Webster, dryly. "Rings are all right, and so are romances, in their proper places. But for success in a ticklish business like the investigation of Squire Courthope's death, give me a clear brain and a trustworthy staff."

And, when events were examined in the light of subsequent evidence, the detective was entitled to crow more than a little, because James Courthope's journey to London was the fatalest thing he did in a period crammed with fatality — and Webster alone knew why.

## CHAPTER XVII

### MR. WEBSTER CONSTRUCTS A PLAY

For the proper understanding of the later acts of the Hudston drama, it is necessary to imagine how Mr. Inspector Webster occupied his time when Philip Warren went from Nutworth to London.

The detective took Mr. Isambard by surprise when he announced his intent to remain in Nutworth. The vicar, of course, looked forward to his company for the homeward drive, but Webster politely excused himself on the score of "a few minor inquiries."

During the next half-hour it would have been a difficult thing for any one to perceive the form those unimportant inquiries would take. The detective lounged through the streets of the small market-town, gazed in at the shop windows, became so interested in a sweet-selling industry that he entered the shop, purchased some peppermints, came out again, and lit a fresh cigar from the stump of an old one. It chanced, by accident, of course, that Mr. Bennett, dapper and sharp-looking as ever, came out of his office just as Webster determined to buy sweets. Therefore, Bennett did not see him; possibly Webster did not intend that Bennett should see him.

It also chanced that Jeffry, Bennett's confidential

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clerk, who followed his master a few minutes later, met Mr. Webster face to face in the High Street, and showed a rather mystified face in response to a hearty greeting.

"What! You haven't forgotten me, have you?" cried Webster. "I was at the Courthope inquest; represented Scotland Yard, you know."

"Oh, yes! Delighted, I'm sure. I was only at the inquest one day. So busy, you see. Anything I can do for you?"

"Nothing at the moment, thanks."

"How goes the case?"

"Simple. Too easy. I look on my stay here in the light of a holiday."

"Rather bleak weather just now, to my taste."

"I don't mind it. It is a treat to a Londoner to be able to tramp along country roads. The long nights are the worst features of existence. I find them dreadfully slow."

"Well, I must be off. Not much time for luncheon."

"By the way," said the detective, genially, unwilling to part from an agreeable companion, "do you play draughts, or dominoes?"

"Both. Why?"

"I return to Hudston by the 5.15. It occurred to me it might suit your convenience if you came with me, shared my cutlets, and smoked some of my cigars over a glass and a game. There is a train at a reasonable hour, and you will help me to kill one dull evening."

Jeffry hesitated. He was suspicious by calling and by nature, but this Scotland Yard man ought to be entertaining.

"It will be rather a rush to catch the 5.15," he said.

"Come now, try," cried Webster, expansively.

## *Mr. Webster Constructs a Play*

"Well —"

"But, a word in your ear. Say nothing about it. I am not supposed to be amusing myself here, you know. And people who don't know can't talk."

"Evidently wants a social evening," thought Jeffry, so: "Right you are," he said. "Meet you at the station."

Then Mr. Webster began his inquiries, which assumed a peculiar shape. He called at the police-station, received a telegram, wrote a long message, lounged out, asked the way to a neighboring village, walked there, inspected an ancient church tower with a tree growing out of the roof, sampled the beer in an inn, showed much interest in the landlord's prize pigs, and generally revealed himself as an accomplished flâneur. But he was at Nutworth station in good time, and smiled affably when Mr. Bennett's confidential clerk turned up not many minutes before the train arrived.

"I did hope you might not be detained," said Webster. "Are you so busy? This is a slack time, isn't it?"

"A firm like ours is always hard at it, Mr. Webster."

"Ah, yes. County families' estates, and that sort of thing. Dull work, but useful, and it pays well."

Jeffry, feeling that his employer's reputation did not warrant this favorable estimate — as poor Robert Court-hope's was the last estate remaining on Bennett's books since the death of his partner — changed the subject.

"Life is slow here; whatever one's work," he said. "It must be a very different thing for you, Mr. Webster. I wonder how you can stand the racket. I couldn't. Excitement would kill me."

"I hope not," was Webster's sincere comment. "You

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never know what you can do till you try. Now, when I first joined the force —”

And he kept Jeffry supplied with most remarkable and varied reminiscences until dinner was ended, and the two were seated in easy chairs before a bright fire, with glasses and a decanter on the table, flanked with a box of cigars. The wizened clerk was a great reader of the newspapers, and it electrified him to hear the secret, unwritten history of many famous crimes. Each story had its crisis, a quick, breathless combat between law and guilt, and its staccato end. “Hanged at Norwich, he was,” or “Hawkins gave him a lifer,” or “We found him dead as a mackerel when we burst the door from its hinges.” Never a wrong-doer escaped Webster’s net. No matter how daring or astute the criminal, he was caught at last, and made to suffer, either by outraged law or by his own hand.

At last, Jeffry’s nervous system showed signs of wear. He fidgeted, and glanced at a small clock on the mantelpiece.

“You make me feel quite creepy,” he vowed. “I sincerely trust you may never be after me, Mr. Webster. I should count myself a doomed man.”

“Oh, I’m not infallible. I’ve only told you my wins. There are a lot of losses in the ledger. I am half persuaded this Hudston business will best me, unless one man makes a mistake.”

“I suppose it would be hardly fair to ask you to name anybody, though, of course, one name comes to mind instantly.”

“Whose?”

“Philip Warren’s.”

“Not at all. He didn’t kill the Squire.”

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"Are you — speaking seriously?"

"Never more so. The man whom I want to take a false step, and maybe he is doing it to-day, is James Courthope."

Jeffry was far from expecting the sudden intrusion of James into their talk. His wizened features twitched, and the cigar he was smoking crackled slightly between his fingers.

"Oh, really!" he cried, trying to exhibit quiet sarcasm at Webster's joke.

"You regard that as funny, eh? Well, let me explain things to you. And help yourself to another drink."

"What about that game of draughts?"

"We're in no hurry. And you, owing to your intimate acquaintance with all the parties concerned, ought to be interested in what I am telling you."

"I am, very interested. But, you see, Mr. Courthope is a client of ours."

"Of Mr. Bennett, not yours. Quite a different matter when it comes to law-breaking. You are a sensible man, Jeffry, so you would be the last person to admit that a solicitor's clerk should carry his loyalty to employer and client so far as to share their guilt."

"By Jove, Mr. Webster, that is a hard thing to say about anybody."

"I wouldn't say it about anybody. Believe me, Jeffry, it is a thousand times more difficult to carry through a big crime than to gain similar ends honestly. I am in earnest. Tell me what James Courthope was doing on the night of the murder and I will tell you how Robert Courthope died."

"I — c-c-can't tell you," stammered Jeffry, feeling as a

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fly may be supposed to feel which has heedlessly blundered into a spider's web.

Webster laughed. He stood up, and went to a drawer, which he unlocked.

"Who said you could?" he cried pleasantly. The sallow clerk was so badly scared that he must be given time to recover. It was no part of Webster's scheme to frighten him too thoroughly yet. A glass chinked against a decanter, and Jeffry took a revive. Webster produced a cardboard box and two flat plans. He placed one of these uppermost, cleared a space on the table, and arranged box and plans where Jeffry could see without rising.

"What have you got there?" asked the guest, in a more collected manner, though his eyes wandered many times from Webster's impassive face to the harmless-looking map and the closed box.

"My stage, my puppets. Shakespeare says that 'all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players,' you know. I saw the truth of those lines early in life, and I hardly ever investigate a crime now without reconstructing it in my little theater. You have read how the French do the same thing with living actors. That must be fine. It would save me a lot of trouble, prevent many mistakes, but I feel sure I can build up this Hudston tragedy in two scenes. Would you like to witness an exhibition of my powers?"

Jeffry would have given all he possessed to be out of that room. He had not the strength needed to carry off such a situation, but he thought he had, and thus erred egregiously.

"Yes," he said. "You know who I am, so I can guess

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you have a good reason for taking me into your confidence."

"Just so. 'Confidence' is the word. But try another cigar. That one is not worth relighting."

While Jeffry struck a match, the detective tumbled out the toy officers, soldiers, and nurses on the table.

"By the way, what is your Christian name?" he demanded suddenly.

"John."

"Thought it was. Odd how some names sound natural to the ear. Here you are, you see. I called you 'John' on the off chance."

"Me! Is that me?"

The clerk's eyes bulged a little as he looked at a leaden dragoon held between the detective's thumb and forefinger.

"Yes, but you are not wanted in this act."

"Am I wanted at all?"

"Not as a principal. You're not alarmed, are you?"

"Why should I be alarmed?"

"Exactly. A man may be charged with all the crimes in the Police Manual, but he has no reason to feel afraid if he is innocent. Now, to business! Here is a map of Hudston and vicinity. You are so well acquainted with the history of Robert Courthope's death that I can skip a good deal of dialogue. In fact, action is more expressive than words."

In spite of ill-repressed tremors, Jeffry could not help experiencing a certain dramatic thrill in following Webster's exposition of the events whereby Robert Courthope met his end. The detective was curt, though he spared no necessary detail, and when he described how Philip leaped



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the Lancault boundary-wall, leaving the red Squire prostrate, breathless, but alive, Jeffrey half rose from his chair and asked, in a shrill, cracked voice:

"Then who killed him, and how?"

"Some one picked up his adversary's sword and plunged it into his heart — to make sure."

"But, good heavens, that must have been James Court-hope!"

"Sh-s-sh! Not so loud! Yes, it seems reasonable. Sit down. My yarn has made you quite hot, I do declare."

"This is a terrible business, Mr. Webster, if what you say is true. I, for one, never imagined —"

"I am quite sure you did not. Yet I am telling you no fairy-tale. I believe it so implicitly that I procured Philip Warren's remand to-day on a trivial charge."

"To-day!"

"Yes, at Nutworth. That is why I was there, you know."

"I — didn't — know," almost sobbed Jeffrey.

"It will be in the papers to-morrow. But you are the only man in England, Mr. Jeffrey, whom I have favored with such a revelation as that which I am now making."

"I can — quite credit that."

"Will you mix yourself another drink before I go on?"

"Is there more, then?"

"Another act, a less exciting one, I promise you."

"I am glad of it," whispered a gray-green Jeffrey.

"Please don't criticise my methods. I am not an ordinary playwright, so my second act goes back in time some six hours before the first, and the scene shifts from Lancault Church to the library at Edenhurst Court."

While glibly discoursing, in a voice which suggested

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nothing save a mere friendly interest on Jeffry's part, the detective had revealed the drawing previously hidden, and the onlooker's straining eyes could make nothing of it. He simply saw a small rectangle within a larger one.

"This is where you can help me a bit, friend John," continued Webster, apparently addressing the toy soldier which represented the clerk. "Now, taking the outer square there to be a rough plan of the room, and the three windows to be here" — Webster calmly searched for a pencil and made little crosses on one of the lines — "where would the door be?"

"There," said Jeffry, with a finger-dab, trying his utmost to look unconcerned.

"I thought so." Webster made two more crosses. "Well, as I said, the time is three o'clock on the afternoon of Robert Courthope's last day on earth. The center square stands for a table. Round it are gathered 'Robert,' 'William,' 'Hannah' and 'John,' the first as chief actor, the second a solicitor, and the two others as witnesses. Important documents are to be signed, and the occasion is a solemn one, because most of those present know that 'Robert' may not live to execute any other important documents."

"I was not aware —"

"Pardon me one moment. This scene has not the action of its predecessor, so I am driven back on character-drawing, and I am not accustomed to it. Moreover, I want your close attention. It will be by far the best, Mr. Jeffry, if you listen to what I am saying — by far the best, I assure you."

Webster's tone and manner had hardened. There was a steel-like sternness in eye and mouth which had

### *Three Men and a Maid*

not been perceptible hitherto. His right hand sought for and grasped each character in the tableau as though he were arresting their living prototypes, and his left hand held the unoffending paper with a sudden rigidity.

"It is possible to picture the different attitudes of these four people," he went on. "Robert, the principal, is uneasy, red-faced, and blear-eyed, for he had not undressed the previous night, but went tearing about the country like a madman. He would not sit down. He preferred to roam about the room restlessly, anxious only to have done with formalities and for the hour to come when he could face his fancied enemy, sword in hand. William, the lawyer, a busy ferret of a man, with a shriveled parchment skin perhaps a trifle yellower than usual, was arranging papers on the table, big sheets of paper, difficult to read at a glance, yet plain enough to the practised eye —"

Beads of perspiration stood on Jeffry's forehead. He swallowed twice, for his throat was dry.

"I swear to you, Mr. Webster —" he began, but the detective almost shouted him down.

"There you go again," he cried, "stopping me just as I was getting into the swing of it. Where was I? Well, we pass to Hannah. She, a somewhat forward country wench, was cowed by the presence of the Squire — the great man — yet not so great that she did not cherish hopes of being a Squire's lady. Not *this* Squire's lady, but the Squire's who would succeed him. For the time, I pass by John, the clerk. He was there at his master's bidding, and saw no shadow of tragedy in the room."

"That's true, as true as heaven's above," broke in Jeffry, and Webster did not rail at him for the interruption.

### *Mr. Webster Constructs a Play*

"Well, the vital question now is — what was the text of those documents awaiting signature? And I want you, as you value your soul and liberty, Jeffry, to believe me when I tell you that I *know* — I **KNOW**!"

"I —" gasped the other.

"Believe me, Jeffry, I *know*. And others know it, too. Robert Courthope told Philip Warren 'before he fought him that he had executed a will leaving Marjorie Neyland his sole heiress. That will was on the table, drawn up in proper legal form by William Bennett, Courthope's solicitor, engrossed by you in utmost haste — so rapidly that you scarce realized what you were doing — and witnessed by you and Hannah Neyland after Robert Courthope had signed it. With the will, as a possible cover for the wrong contemplated by Bennett and inspired by James Courthope, was a trumpery conveyance of a small parcel of land needed for a building scheme. You know enough of the law, Jeffry, to decide now what side you will take in the coming exposure — will you be with me and justice, or with your master and felony?"

The terrified clerk uttered a groan which was half a sob. He strove to gain time to think.

"You are right," he whispered huskily, "I hardly knew what —"

"But you *do* know now. Which is it to be, Jeffry? I have made smooth the way for you, but I can be rough — damned rough when it suits my purpose."

Jeffry began to weep.

"I'm only a poor man," he said brokenly. "I was sure things were all wrong, but who would have believed me, when James was always looked on as Robert's heir, and Philip Warren was wanted for the murder?"

### *Three Men and a Maid*

"You are quite right. You would have been regarded as a lunatic, or sent to prison for slander. That is all altered now. You will have the Treasury behind you, and a case that will hang Courthope and give Bennett penal servitude. Come, my friend, tell me all about it."

"Are you sure —"

"That you will not get into trouble? As sure as I am of my own existence. More than that, you will be well rewarded for helping to right a terrible wrong."

"Well, then, I'll tell you something which, perhaps, you don't guess, wonderful as your story has been. James Courthope took the will, to destroy it, I suppose, but he doesn't know that there was a duplicate."

"Make no mistake. I was coming to that. Bennett and James have been mixed up in other rascalities. I cannot describe them, but easy-going fox-hunters like Robert are made to be robbed by impecunious sharps. Given the chance, and the sharps, and robbery is the certain result. So Bennett kept the duplicate in order to be able to put the screw on James whenever the latter felt inclined to be too masterful."

"Yes, that is it."

"Now, Jeffry, can you put the crown on your good meaning by securing Bennett's copy of the will?"

"I'll try."

"Where is it?"

"In his own safe."

"Do you ever have access to it?"

"No. But it may be possible —"

"I see. Let us avoid details. Get that will, Jeffry, and your future is secure. We *must* have it before suspicion is raised. Get it this week. Risk anything, but

### *Mr. Webster Constructs a Play*

get it. I want it in my hands before Mr. Warren appears in court this day week."

"I'll do it, somehow."

"Gad, you have some go in you, after all. Now, I want to help you. Has Bennet any hold over you?"

Jeffry hung his head. He was in a mood to confess anything.

"Things have been lax in the administration of the Courthope estates for a long time, ever since the late Squire came into possession. Some years ago there was a bit of trouble about a cheque, a rent payment of £50, and Bennett always held it against me."

"I see. You can snap your fingers at him. He will have plenty to occupy his mind without trying to make things hot for you. And remember, you will hardly appear in the matter except as a witness to the will, and you can confuse your account of it. He will regard you as favorable to him, and, in any case, your misdeed cannot be brought up without damaging himself. Have no fear, Jeffry; I'll see you through, but I *must* have that will."

"I promise that."

"Excellent! Have another drink."

"I don't mind if I do. I need it."

"Sorry if I have upset you, but you see what a difficult affair this has been, all round. Just to set your mind at rest, let me tell you that if I had meant to put you in the dock alongside your employer I would never have asked you to eat with me. A detective may be forced to adopt all sorts of dodges, but I have never yet made a man my guest in order to obtain evidence against him."

"Thank you. I have enjoyed my evening very much."

### *Three Men and a Maid*

Jeffry intended this as a mild pleasantry, but he could have chosen no words better calculated to assure Webster of his faithful adherence to the pact between them. The clerk was a small-minded fellow. He was reveling in the prospect of securing a reward, perhaps a small pension, and of wriggling out of a dangerous situation.

Webster extracted some further information, but Jeffry, quite exhausted, wished to return to Nutworth. As the door closed on him, Webster, in an absent-minded way, stretched out his hand for a fresh cigar.

"Draughts or dominoes!" he muttered, with a sigh of relief. "By gad, it ought to have been dice. What a toss-up! I said I wanted a burglar, and I have got him. James! come hither!"

He deftly tied a knot round the neck of the Guardsman who understudied Courthope.

"Got him!" he cried, clenching the cigar in his teeth.

Then, as an after thought, he picked up "William."

"You two ought to be fastened on to one string," he said, suiting the action to the word. Just then a telegram was brought to him. It described Philip's arrest in London, and Webster found he had time to use the telephone before the local post-office closed.

He laughed as he jammed on his hat.

"James is a real wonder," he exclaimed. "It is a pity such a man should require hanging!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### HANNAH SEEKS ADVICE

AN hour's delay, aided by a thick cloak, enabled Marjorie to reach the Greyhound in her father's company without arousing the curiosity of loiterers in the village street. Nevertheless, she had scarce entered the door before Hannah pounced on her, ready to glut her rage on one who usually proved an easy victim.

The cold rebuff administered by James at the station had stirred her vindictive nature to its depths. She had flown home in a rare temper, vowing vengeance on James next day, but eager to find some object on which to vent her present anger. Aunt Margaret was the first person she encountered, but the old lady fled to her room at the first outburst. Not that she was really afraid of her niece, or dreaded any display of physical violence, for Aunt Margaret was a stalwart in more ways than one, but she was shocked by anything approaching a scene "in front of the servants."

So Hannah clattered about the house, and her quick wits told her that her father's unwonted absence at such an hour was bound up with Marjorie's non-arrival at Hudston. Hence, she was on the alert, and Marjorie's



### *Three Men and a Maid*

wish to conciliate the sister who had proved so unsisterly was rudely, indeed coarsely, repelled.

"You've come back, then," was the ungracious speech which greeted the younger woman's appearance. "And with father, too! I'm ashamed of you, father, that I am. You know what folks are saying about Marjorie and Warren, yet you bring her here as though she had been behaving herself properly."

"Hush, lass, hush," said Jonas, "that's no way to talk —"

"No, people never like to hear the truth. Going off to London, so that she might meet Warren. A nice thing! As if we weren't disgraced enough already. Her name's in everybody's mouth."

A hot flush leaped to Marjorie's brow, though she had it in her heart to be forgiving.

"Perhaps few are saying worse things than you at this moment, Hannah," she cried, striving to control voice and temper. "How can you be so unkind? You, my sister, to utter such words! You alone among my relatives know why I left home two nights ago —"

"Do I? That may be so. I heard what you said after you left the tower, but you are deep, Marjorie, too deep, and all Hudston has taken your measure by this time, as you would have found out if you had come to the station with your man. As for you, father, helping her in such goings on, I think you must be mad."

"I'll tell you what," roared Jonas, stirred to sudden frenzy, "I'll not be spoken to that way in my own house by any bairn of mine. Get ye te bed, ye vixen. Get ye te bed, and thank the Lord ye hev a faither who has mair sense than te tak' heed o' your cackle."

## *Hannah Seeks Advice*

Hannah tossed her head scornfully.

"I'll let you all see in the morning who is to be considered here," she cried. "Don't you run away with the idea that Philip Warren is going to escape scot free for killing the Squire. There's a man in Hudston who will take care of that, and I have no doubt he told you so in London, Marjorie, though why James should be so infatuated about you is more than I can fathom. Even the cleverest of men can be fooled by a woman, I suppose."

"You have a lot to say about men," came a voice from the stairs. "Happen it would be a good thing for you to keep fast hold of your own man and leave Marjorie's alone. Welcome home, honey. I was the one to bid you leave Hudston, and now I hope you will never leave us again, but that you have come back happy and loved by the man you have been so faithful to."

Aunt Margaret swept Hannah aside fearlessly, and folded Marjorie in her arms, while the girl's mother, hearing the unexpected clamor in the hall, came forward, too, to embrace the runaway. Hannah, by no means anxious to have the whole household arrayed against her, thought fit to modify her attitude.

"What's the use of pretending that our neighbors are not full of gossip about Marjorie?" she said. "I only meant that it would be better if Marjorie had stopped in London, seeing that she went there of her own free will. And are you all crazy to pretend that Mr. Warren won't be tried for murder? Am I making up a story to spite any one? Isn't the country full of it? See to-day's papers if you doubt me."

Now, during the long journey in the train, Philip and Marjorie had gone so carefully through the whole of the

### *Three Men and a Maid*

facts known to them, that Mr. Webster himself could have added but little to the case they made out against James Courthope, and it was but too clearly established that Hannah had been not only his dupe but his confederate throughout.

It was on the tip of Marjorie's tongue to rebuke Hannah for daring to cloak her malice under the guise of friendly concern, but she recollected the detective's earnest request that she should betray no item of the knowledge she possessed, so she contented herself by saying:

"You do not need me to tell you how unjust public suspicion may be, Hannah. Search your own heart and bend your knees in humble prayer. Perhaps you may be vouchsafed light and guidance. Above all else, believe that Philip Warren demands and will cheerfully undergo the closest scrutiny of his actions. He has nothing to fear from inquiry, but just the contrary. To close the investigation into the manner of Robert Courthope's death, or leave unsolved the causes which led to it, would do Philip the greatest injustice."

Hannah became dumb so suddenly that Marjorie feared she had said too much. Yet, reviewing her words in the privacy of her own room later, she could see no other course open than to proclaim Philip's innocence. And, to her mind, not being versed in legal subtleties, she could see no flaw in the evidence connecting James with the murder. True, the chief witness would be Philip, and the case against James depended wholly on circumstances, but what judge and jury would fail to believe her Philip? And was not nearly every secret murderer convicted by circumstantial evidence?

Of course, Marjorie soon reasoned herself into sweet

## *Hannah Seeks Advice*

and untroubled slumber. Hannah, on the other hand, tossed restlessly until daylight. At the first possible hour she went to Edenhurst Court, and asked to see James, but a man-servant brought a curt message that "Mr. Courthope was ill and could see nobody."

"Tell your master that he must contrive to give me a few minutes," she said stubbornly. "Tell him I have news of the utmost importance."

The footman, rather afraid of her, yet dreading the loss of his situation, sought the butler, and the butler, risking James's anger, conveyed Hannah's earnest request in person.

But James was tired of Hannah's urging towards an early marriage, and he had determined to play in his own way the serious game which lay before him. Her insistence, her pleading, the mere sight of a face that became wan with anxiety the moment he was in her presence, angered and fettered him. So he bade the butler tell her that he was asleep, under the influence of an opiate administered by the doctor, but if she could come to the Court about the luncheon-hour, the Squire would certainly be awake then.

Ill content, Hannah walked back to the village. At one o'clock she was at the Court again, where she received the chilling intelligence that Mr. Courthope had risen soon after her early call and was gone to Darlington. Somehow, Hannah's unquestioned pluck failed her at this crisis. She realized that James meant to cast her off — that he was not to be terrified by anything she might do or say in vain effort to bring him to her side again.

She held her head high before the solemn-jowled foot-

### *Three Men and a Maid*

man, but when she reached the shelter of the avenue of elms she broke into a storm of tears.

This calmed her a little. She dried her eyes, and resolved to take a walk over the moors, thus giving herself time to think and plan, while the exercise would serve to compose her features and remove the redness from swollen eyelids.

She was tall and strong, a fine figure of a woman, and recent events had developed in her nature a dour tenacity of purpose which few would have suspected in the buxom country maid of a year ago. Careless of time and distance, she pressed along a moorland road until a spire peeped over the shoulder of a hill. That was Nutworth Church, and the sight of Nutworth brought Bennett to her mind.

Suddenly she stood. A daring thought had gripped her so firmly that it seemed to clog her very limbs. What of Bennett as an ally? She had often heard whispers of his capacity for double-dealing — here, then, was an opportunity for the display of his ripest talent. Why not throw in her lot with Bennett? If she helped him to gain the wealth he labored for with such ignominy, he might help her to secure a husband and an assured position. The more she pondered the scheme the more she liked it. At last, throwing hesitancy to the winds, she set out at a good pace, and never paused until she was inside Bennett's office and asking for him.

Though absorbed in her own affairs, she did not fail to notice that Jeffry was disturbed at seeing her. She little dreamed how uneasy was the clerk's consciousness — for to speak of Jeffry's conscience would be to name the thing that is not — but, being a novice in the schemer's art, she

### *Hannah Seeks Advice*

attributed his quick pallor to something James had said about her, whereas Jeffry, more acute in scenting mischief, guessed exactly what her errand was.

"Well," she said in her brusque way, "what are you gaping at? Tell Mr. Bennett that Miss Neyland wishes to consult him. Miss Hannah Neyland, you had better say, to prevent mistakes."

"Yes, madam. Mr. Bennett will be disengaged in a few minutes. Will you take a seat?"

"Is anybody else with him?"

"No, madam."

"Then tell him I am here. His documents can wait."

She did not want Bennett to marry her, so she was by no means timid, now that she had resolved to burn her boats. Nor did she quail when admitted to the presence of the great little man, who was civil enough in manner, though he scrutinized her with a wary eye.

She opened the attack boldly.

"I have come," she said, "to have a chat with you about my affairs, and yours, too, for that matter. You know, of course, that I am the promised wife of Mr. James Courthope?"

"I — er — Mr. Courthope has not — er — confided his intentions in that respect, Miss Neyland."

"Oh! Hasn't he? It is high time he did. You have heard about him and me, I am sure, but you are too clever to admit it. Anyhow, you can't say next time it is news to you. James Courthope has promised to marry me, but he seems to have gone mad over my sister, and I have good reason to believe he wants to throw me over. Now, I won't let him do that, Mr. Bennett, and if you are half as wise as you look, you will help me to bring him to reason."

### *Three Men and a Maid*

"Really, Miss Neyland, what can I do? Mr. Courthope is a gentleman who would form his own opinions on such a matter, and I would lay myself open to a very severe snub if I ventured to discuss it with him."

Mr. Bennett pressed the tips of his outstretched fingers together, as was his habit when solving some knotty legal problem, but Hannah's scornful retort startled him into a less complacent attitude.

"Better that than lay yourself open to a long term of penal servitude," she snapped, her eyes sparkling and her forehead seamed in anger.

"What on earth do you mean?" cried the lawyer.

"You don't understand me, eh? Look here, Mr. Bennett, just keep your pretences for those who believe in them. You know all about that will, and if I have to sink in the struggle for my rights I will take care that James Courthope and you go down with me. Wait a bit —" for the solicitors' thin lips opened in protest — "you just hear me out. I am fighting for myself, and I don't want to injure you. Lawyer and all as you are, I know James better than you do, and he will give in with a good grace when he finds the bit in his mouth. If you assist me in this business you will be the gainer. It will prove that you have the whip hand over him, and you can ask your own terms."

"What in the world are you talking about?" asked Bennett, to gain time. Hannah smiled sourly. Notwithstanding her limitations, she read accurately what was passing in the man's brain.

"Sorry if I have upset you," she said in a quieter tone. "I did not mean to speak crossly, but I do hate people to pretend they are innocent when they are up to the neck

## *Hannah Seeks Advice*

in a thing all the time. It is very simple to understand what I am talking about. Robert Courthope made a will leaving everything he possessed to my sister, Marjorie."

Bennett was a versatile rogue. The only question before him was whether he should throw in his lot with James or with Hannah. He chose instantly. A man might be depended on for fixity of purpose, a woman never. So his finger-tips automatically sought each other's support, and his waxen face creased in what passed as a smile.

"You are talking sheer nonsense, Miss Neyland," he broke in, "sheer nonsense, my dear young lady, and it would be unkind of me to let you proceed further without correcting your outrageous statement."

It had never occurred to Hannah that there could be any dispute between the four conspirators who gathered in the library of Edenhurst Court on the afternoon of Robert's death. When James Courthope summoned her to witness the signing of the will he had incautiously blurted out that it was his cousin's intent to disinherit him in Marjorie's favor. She was not able to decipher a great deal of the large documents spread on the table, but she had dawdled as much as possible, even in the matter of removing her gloves, and she had fastened on to two phrases, "I appoint the said Marjorie Neyland sole executrix. . . . I hereby revoke all former wills and codicils. . . ."

Some patient scrutiny of works of reference revealed to her the immense importance of those words, and she was well aware that the will submitted for probate was dated some six years earlier. Yet here was this man, with a face like a mask, telling her that she was wrong — that no such will existed. Her mouth set in a close line, and her eyelids drooped.



### *Three Men and a Maid*

"Oh," she almost whispered, so tense was the venom in her voice. "Oh, is that it? Very well, Mr. Bennett, there are others who will listen if you won't."

As a matter of fact, one other was listening then. Jeffry, who had long deemed it prudent to be more conversant with his master's affairs than the said master seemingly desired, had followed the precedent set by Dionysius of Syracuse in constructing for himself a "King's Ear" in the floor of the room overhead. By moving a deed box and a loose plank, and laying his head between two rafters, he could hear fairly well all that passed beneath.

Bennett, watching Hannah closely, bethought him that he might have used more diplomacy in his denial.

"I repeat," he said, "that it is nonsense to speak in that way to a solicitor. Let us imagine, for one instant, that what you say is true — do you realize what it means? Mr. Courthope and I would be held guilty of a most serious offence, we both would be sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, and you would lose a husband and a fortune. Surely, if Mr. Courthope has promised to marry you he can be brought to fulfil his promise by a less drastic method than that which you propose, especially as the mere hint of such a charge would render you liable to arrest for criminal libel."

Hannah, though boiling with temper, was not deaf to the suggestion underlying Bennett's smooth sentences.

"I see what you are driving at," she muttered. "You haven't earned your character as a sly fox for nothing. Naturally, you will be the last man to admit that you have committed a fraud. But all this pretense is wasted on me. I know there was a will, and James knows it,

### *Hannah Seeks Advice*

and that lean clerk of yours knows it. I heard enough at the inquest to feel sure that a smart lawyer would turn you inside out if he had you in the box and you tried to deny that will. Yet I tell you that I seek nothing of the sort. Keep to the real point. Will you help me to marry the man I want?"

"Yes," was the instant reply. "I will do everything that lies in my power, Miss Neyland."

"Now you are talking. What *does* lie in your power?"

"Well, let me see. Your sister is engaged to this Warren, I take it?"

"I suppose so. What all the men see in her —"

"And Warren is to be tried on some absurd charge next Tuesday?"

"So they say."

"Have you heard why the police have dropped, or apparently dropped, the charge of murder?"

"I don't know. That meddling detective, Webster, seemed to think that some other person killed the Squire."

"Some other person?"

"Yes."

The eyes of the man and the woman met. The man saw a fierce glare which told of storm ill pent, the woman saw a new suspicion, adding, if possible, to the wily aspect of the man.

"It is my deliberate opinion," said the solicitor slowly, "that the interests you have at heart will be best served if you take no step until the proceedings against Philip Warren develop further. The worst thing you can do, the very worst thing, Miss Neyland, would be to disturb, or, shall I say, threaten Mr. Courthope at this juncture. You can rely on me as a friend, as a real friend, I assure

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you. Please cast out of your mind all unpleasantness. Let the words we have spoken to-day be forgotten. Look on them as a mere figment of the imagination. That will be best, and leave it to me to bring about the union which you have set your heart upon.

"Do you mean that?"

"I have never been more in earnest in my life."

"I intend to write James to-day."

"Write? Is he not at Hudston?"

"No. At least, his servants told me he had gone to Darlington."

"Ah, very possible. A transfer of certain shares has to be arranged there in person. One further bit of advice, Miss Neyland — put nothing in writing that can be spoken."

"You may be right," said Hannah sullenly. "At any rate, a few days more or less can make little difference. My mind is made up. Once and for all, if James does not say he regrets the way he has treated me, and give me the only assurance of his faith in the shape of a wedding ring, I will dare all to punish him."

Bennett questioned her closely as to events in Hudston the previous night, and did not fail to reassert his good intent.

When Hannah passed through the outer office she met Jeffry coming in.

"A nice pair, master and man," she thought, glancing disdainfully at the clerk. She went back to Hudston by train, well satisfied with the day's doings, and she would have been the most surprised woman in Yorkshire were she told that she had not only strengthened the hands of the "meddling detective," but had almost succeeded in

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stamping the broad arrow on James Courthope's fashionable mourning garments.

For Jeffry, finding another Richmond in the field, was more resolved than ever to secure the will and the indemnity Webster had promised him, and Bennett had persuaded her not to write to James, thereby preventing a warning of the impending crash from reaching that astute individual, and Bennett himself was muzzled, when his counsel might have benefited his client, because the small lawyer was afraid to broach the subject of Hannah's marriage with the masterful James, and in no other way could he explain the reason of her visit. . . .

In fact, the stars in their courses were fighting for Philip and Marjorie while portending dire disaster for James and Hannah. And, as stars move in silent orbits — astrologers, too, being scarce in Hudston — the passing of five days gave but slight concern to the personages chiefly interested in their wondrous convolutions.

James did not return to Hudston until the Saturday. He was somewhat surprised by receiving a call from a police inspector in a Newcastle hotel. The officer handed him a subpoena to attend the trial of Philip Warren at Nutworth, and, in response to a question, said that the local authorities had told him exactly where the needed witness could be found. As none knew whither he had gone after leaving Darlington, the incident was displeasing to James, who wished to avoid the hearing of the case against Philip. Not being able to help himself, he put a good face on it, and went to Hudston by the next train. If the police were watching him, it was best to show that he did not fear them.

But he steadfastly avoided any meeting with Hannah,

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and she curbed her wrath sufficiently to enable Bennett's advice to have its worst effect. On that same Saturday morning Jeffry managed to extract the will from Bennett's safe. The clerk had been filing industriously all the week at a key to fashion it to a mould taken in wax; but chance helped him better than his skill as a locksmith. Bennett ran out, bare-headed, to give some parting instructions to a bankrupt whose estate he hoped to squeeze dry as liquidator, and, in that fortunate interval, Jeffry seized the precious parchment.

He was so overcome with fear at the last moment that he bolted up-stairs, nor did he dare to face his employer. He left word with the office boy that he was ill, and again, on Monday, was he so affected that he remained at home.

On that same Monday Bennett was annoyed at being favored with a subpoena as a witness for the Crown in the Warren affair. Indeed, the person who looked forward to the next day's proceedings with the calmest and most equable mind was the defendant himself. But that might be accounted for by two facts. In the first place, he had enjoyed a long walk on the moors with Marjorie and his other hounds during the afternoon, and, in the second, he had read Robert Courthope's will, which, he was lawyer enough to see, was a most convincing document in his favor.

## CHAPTER XIX

### IN COURT

WHEN a policeman usher announced "The King *v.* Warren," a buzz of interest hummed through the crowded police-court, at Nutworth. The murmuring of the human hive was stilled as speedily as it arose. Necks were craned in the effort to see, the slightly deaf turned the better ear to the front, or made sounding-boards of their hands; even the solemn magistrates squared their blotting-pads and took fresh dips of ink.

The first move was made by Mr. Hardinge, of Nutworth, who represented Philip. He asked that the defendant might be permitted to sit by his side at the solicitor's table. "Agreed," said the bench.

"And I wish all witnesses in this case to be ordered out of court," went on Mr. Hardinge.

Mr. Walker, a very smart solicitor from New York, who watched the case on behalf of James Courthope, — Bennett being prevented from filling that rôle because of his witness subpoena, — protested that such a step was unnecessary. But Hardinge stuck to his demand, and the bench conceded it, of course.

This meant that all who gave evidence at the inquest, their number being reinforced now by Mr. Bennett, had

### *Three Men and a Maid*

to sit together in the witnesses' room, where private conversation was practically impossible, and Marjorie had the vicar for company.

Mr. Whitaker, of Allonby, appeared for the police, and his opening statement practically covered the ground broken by the coroner's inquiry.

Before evidence was called, Mr. Walker wanted to know why the police were proceeding against Philip on a minor count, in view of the obvious gravity of the charge hanging over him, owing to the finding of the jury at the inquest.

Mr. Whitaker's reply electrified the court.

"I expected that question to be put," he said slowly. "The local police authorities, with the approval of the Treasury, believe they are acting in the interests of justice in following this procedure."

"But, in plain English, that means they intend to try some person other than Philip Warren for the murder of Robert Courthope," cried Walker, with the supercilious smile of an advocate who is sure of his power to break down an ill-constructed case.

"My friend is well aware that the Treasury will act in this matter on their own lines," was Whitaker's non-committal answer, and Walker smiled again, confidently. When his chance came, he intended to place the noose round Philip's neck so tightly that the court would probably order his arrest on the more serious indictment.

The finding of the body, its injuries, the police testimony, and other kindred matters produced no new thing. All these details had been worn to shreds by the local press. There was a rustle of anticipation when Marjorie stepped into the witness-box, offering a very different

## *In Court*

aspect to her wobegone appearance during the inquest. Yet her story evoked no excitement. Mr. Whitaker did not cross-examine her, but Mr. Hardinge put one question which thrilled all hearers.

"You have told us that, to the best of your belief, Mr. Robert Courthope was waiting at the Greyhound Hotel on the evening you were locked in Fennell's Tower with the defendant, and that his declared intent was to ask your hand in marriage. Is it not a fact that his cousin, Mr. James Courthope, has more than once proposed to you during the past fortnight?"

"What has that to do with the ludicrously inadequate charge now preferred against Warren? I ask that the bench shall disallow that impertinent query," shouted Mr. Walker.

"And I insist that it shall be answered," said Hardinge, quietly.

"In a case where motive is all-important, we think the question a proper one," answered the chairman, after consulting his fellow-magistrates.

"Yes," said Marjorie.

"And you have refused him?"

"Not at first, but quite unmistakably when last we parted from each other in London."

Hardinge sat down. Up bounced Walker, with a fine legal sneer. Like all skilled lawyers, he began his cross-examination at the point where the witness's evidence ended.

"Indeed!" he cried. "When last you parted, eh? Were you in the habit of meeting him?"

"No. He often sought my company. I never sought his."



### *Three Men and a Maid*

"Naturally. All well-behaved young ladies act in that way. It is the recognized formula for catching the male fish. But am I wrong in assuming that you are engaged to the defendant?"

"No. You are right."

"Since when, may I ask?"

"Since we were imprisoned in the tower."

"Ah! Engaged to one man, yet angling for the other. One hears of such things, but they are not quite — fair, shall I say?"

No answer, though Marjorie mystified many by smiling radiantly at Philip, whose serene face showed no trace of annoyance at Walker's personalities.

"Come, now, Miss Neyland," insisted the lawyer. "If this is to resolve itself into an analysis of motive, and supposing your preposterous story be true, why did you, on your own showing, uselessly encourage Mr. James Courthope's attentions?"

"In the effort to obtain evidence which should clear Mr. Warren of any shadow of guilt."

"Guilt! Of Robert Courthope's murder you mean?"

"Yes."

"Good gracious! A lady detective, it would seem. And were you successful?"

"I cannot tell, yet."

"I want a plainer answer, please."

"It is not for me to give a verdict. That is a matter for judge and jury."

Mr. Walker had not earned a great reputation by blunderingly helping an opponent's case. He suddenly became conscious of an unseen pit, and drew himself up with an artistic display of indifference.

## *In Court*

"I ask leave to adjourn the further cross-examination of this witness," he said, adding magnanimously that Marjorie might remain in court.

The vicar followed. He had not much to say, and none of the lawyers pestered him. Then James Courthouse was called, and, as he entered the witness-box, the audience again betrayed its interest by a closer humping of shoulders and a new adjustment of eyes and ears.

James was self-collected, cool, and seemingly quite oblivious of the scrutiny he attracted. He went through the story of the day of Robert's death without varying a syllable from the version he put before the coroner. It was noted by all that Mr. Whitaker did not adopt the slightly hostile tone he had used at the inquest. He took James's account of Robert's comings and goings, together with Robert's reputed statement that it was he who locked the door of Fennell's Tower, without endeavoring to find discrepancies in the narrative.

In fact, James emerged from his examination-in-chief very creditably, and, if anything, he was even calmer and more urbane in manner when Mr. Hardinge rose to cross-examine. Yet the first question appeared to surprise him greatly.

"Miss Marjorie Neyland has told the court that you have proposed marriage to her more than once since your cousin's death. Is that true, Mr. Courthouse?"

Up went James's hand to his beard. He gave Marjorie a quick glance, but her face was hidden.

"Am I compelled to deal with such an unwarrantable probing into my private affairs?" he asked, after a pause.

"I do not press it if you refuse to answer," said Hardinge, blandly.

### *Three Men and a Maid*

"Let it pass, then," was the instant retort.

"Have you also promised to marry Miss Hannah Neyland?"

"Again I demand —"

"Shall we let that pass, too?" said Hardinge.

"Yes."

"Very well. We come now to matters which cannot be dealt with so tenderly. Why did you ride in furious haste to Nutworth on that morning, Mr. Courthope?"

"Did I?"

"I want you to tell me."

"But 'furious riding' lays me open to a fine, you know."

The reply tickled a sporting community. Courthope, who smiled at the amused crowd, did not fail to note that Hardinge's gravity was not lessened. The solicitor seemed to be choosing his words with exceeding care. But the witness's eyes encountered those of Inspector Webster, who, nibbling his mustache, gazed at James with frank admiration.

"You rode so fast that, in seven miles, you overtook and passed a groom sent in hot haste by your cousin to summon Mr. Bennett, the solicitor, though the man had nearly a quarter of an hour's start of you," went on Hardinge.

"I am not exactly a slow person where a horse is concerned," said James, lightly. "I remember now I did ride to Nutworth, though I cannot recall the other circumstance you mention. I was going to a hunt ball that night, and found that I had run short of dress ties."

"Did you buy them at Mr. Bennett's?"

"An absurd suggestion. I bought them at a shop in the High Street."

## *In Court*

"But you went straight to Mr. Bennett's office?"

"That might have been a mere chance."

"Did you go there?"

"I may have done so. I really cannot be certain."

"I will refresh your memory. Had not your cousin announced his intention of making a fresh will, and was it not vital to your interests that you should see his solicitor?"

"But why?"

"So that, with his aid, you might prepare for eventualities in the event of Robert Courthope's death."

"Would you mind putting that more clearly?" asked James, whose right hand traveled half-way up from the rail of the witness-box towards his beard, but went quickly back again. Perhaps he needed its aid to steady himself, and he certainly was a shade paler.

"I mean that it would be a very serious thing for you if your cousin disinherited you, which it was in his power to do," said Hardinge.

"Even so, I fail to see any reason why I should ride furiously to Bennett's, as you put it."

"Well, then, have you any knowledge that Robert Courthope made a will that afternoon?"

"None whatever."

"You will be exceedingly surprised, therefore, if a properly drawn up and attested will is produced, a will whereby he left nearly everything he possessed to Miss Marjorie Neyland."

"I — shall — be — exceedingly — surprised," echoed James, with a gallant attempt to treat the affair off-handedly.

Again Mr. Walker sprang to his feet.

### *Three Men and a Maid*

"What earthly bearing on the present charge have Robert Courthope's testamentary dispositions, which, I understand, were arranged years ago?" he roared.

"My case is that Robert Courthope was safe in Mr. Warren's hands, but that others conspired to secure his death," said Hardinge.

"Then you must try those undiscovered shadows on the capital indictment, and not seek to obtain evidence in this amazing and underhanded way," cried Walker.

"If I may be allowed to intervene, I want to say that I have nothing to conceal," put in James, and, though Webster favored him with another appreciative glance, he did not appear to notice it.

Hardinge waved aside the interruption.

"At any rate, you know that Bennett visited Edenhurst Court that afternoon, as it is in evidence that your cousin signed a transfer of land then?" he said.

"Yes."

"The deed was witnessed by Bennett's clerk, Jeffry, and by Miss Hannah Neyland. Did you regard the latter as a peculiar witness, peculiar in the sense that she was brought from the village, whereas there were dozens of servants available at the Court?"

"Robert may have wished to keep the affair private?"

"But it was you who asked Miss Neyland to attend there?"

James hesitated, a fraction of a second.

"I believe so," he said. "Probably that was in Robert's mind when he wished her to be present."

"You mentioned none of these circumstances at the inquest?"

"Why should I? They are irrelevant."

## *In Court*

"We shall see. Coming now to the hour fixed for the alleged duel — about 8.30 P.M., it has been stated — where were you then?"

"In the Court, preparing for the hunt ball at Allonby."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite positive."

"But you dressed in the Queen's Hotel at Allonby at 10.15, having sent your man there with your clothes at eight o'clock?"

"I fancy you are all wrong as to the time, but I really forget."

"Surely that is impossible. You rode up at 10.15 on a horse which bore every token of hard riding —"

"You make me out a species of Wild Horseman," broke in James.

"I accept your words. That is what you were, particularly if, as I am ready to maintain, you rode to Allonby straight from Lancault churchyard, leaving your cousin lying dead there, with a rapier planted in his heart."

Never was forensic assault delivered more unexpectedly in a court of law. Hardinge's voice was so guarded that there was not the slightest premonitory hint of this volcanic outburst. It smote every ear with the appalling effect of thunder from a summer sky. James blanched, gripped the rail convulsively, and glared at Hardinge as though he wished to leap at his throat. A hoarse murmur of amazement ran through the assembly, which was only quelled by Walker's angry bellow:

"Are you charging Mr. James Courthope with the murder of his cousin?"

"That is not my business," said Hardinge, suddenly resuming his seat.

### *Three Men and a Maid*

Mr. Walker strove valiantly to discredit the sensation created by the defending solicitor. He led James, word by word, through explanations of his movements on that memorable night, and brought out in bold relief the undoubted fact, that, in succeeding to the Edenhurst estate, James had only fulfilled the knowledge and expectation of all who were acquainted with Robert's wishes.

When James was about to leave the box he asked the magistrates if his presence was further required. That bewildered them somewhat, but the chairman announced that perhaps it would be better if he did not go far away from the precincts of the court until the inquiry was ended. He bowed politely, and darted one searching look at Mr. Webster. The latter was examining a pile of papers, and biting away at his mustache. So James sat down, quite near to Marjorie, and nonchalantly wiped some dust off his fingers with a cambric pocket-handkerchief.

Hannah was called. Mr. Hardinge let her off easily.

"How many documents did you witness in the library of the Court?" he asked.

"One, I think," she said, desperately averting her eyes from James, because this was a question that seemed to have in it some foreboding of evil.

"Are you not certain?" inquired the lawyer.

"No. I was rather flurried, not being used to such things. Mr. Bennett said, 'Sign here,' and I just did as I was told — signed one, I think."

She could have given no better answer. And then, like James, she received a staggering query.

"Are you engaged to be married to Mr. James Court-hope?"

## *In Court*

There was a sudden singing in her ears. What a chance of establishing herself! Before all these people!

"Yes," she said, and the syllable had a metallic click, so dry was her throat.

"Thank you. That is all."

Not a word about the letter written by Philip and addressed by Robert, the letter which she had explained away in tears and agony before the coroner. The reaction of relief nearly made her faint. But she sank into a seat, and she wondered dully why the packed court was so obviously excited when Mr. Whitaker called "Mr. Bennett."

Bennett had really nothing to say which bore on the charge against Philip. Therefore, knowing a good deal of police ways, he guessed that he would be cross-examined with some ulterior object in view. The foxy eyes of experience told him that something out of the common had happened already. The very aspect of the magistrates — worthy squires who seldom dealt with crime of higher import than game trespass — gave a warning of the unusual. So he braced himself for the ordeal when Hardinge rose, nor was he kept long in doubt.

"You have been the legal adviser to the Edenhurst estate for many years, I believe?" began Hardinge.

"Yes, fifteen, or thereabouts."

"And you knew the property was not entailed?"

"Of course."

"So Mr. Robert Courthope could hand it over to whomsoever he chose?"

"Yes."

"Was he of sound mind?"



### *Three Men and a Maid*

"I should say so."

"Quite fit to devise his wealth as he thought fit?"

"Oh, yes."

"Were you not surprised, then, when he instructed you to draw up a will leaving everything he died possessed of, excepting a few legacies, to Miss Marjorie Neyland?"

The wizened, parchment skin shriveled somewhat. Bennett, small as he was, shrank visibly. The one thing he could not help doing was to glare like a basilisk at Hannah, in whose sudden pallor he found proof, as he thought, of her mad folly. That was his undoing. He was far too shrewd a lawyer to make admissions which might subsequently be used against him. But the terror of Hannah, to whom Hardinge's question came like a gun-shot, gave him an imaginary clue which he fancied would lead toward safety, and he answered, with a certain professional dryness:

"That is a stupid invention."

"Whose invention?"

"I leave that to you."

"You allude to Miss Hannah Neyland, I suppose?"

"Well, yes, since names must be given."

"She told you that?"

"Yes,"

"Why?"

"Because she wished me to help her in an ambitious project."

"What was it?"

"I decline to explain myself further."

"Then no such will was ever executed?"

"Not to my knowledge."

Once more Mr. Webster showed his appreciation. This

## *In Court*

was a case after his own heart. How glad he was that "James" and "William" were tied together by a piece of string, and reposing, thus bound, in a cardboard box in his rooms at Hudston.

"So, if such a will exists," said Mr. Hardinge smoothly, "it was not prepared by you?"

"Certainly not."

"Even though it bears the signature of your firm, and is attested by one of your clerks?"

"It is a forgery."

"Though it was signed in your presence, and can be shown to have been in your possession?"

Those words "to have been" spoke volumes. What did Hardinge know? How far had treachery gone? And who was the traitor?

"The whole story is a lie," said Bennett, grimly determined not to budge from the line he had mistakenly followed. He saw now that a more deadly intelligence than Hannah's had been at work. His active brain carried him out of that remote country court to the Assizes at York. He found himself facing a judge, and fighting tenaciously for freedom, and he knew that every word he said now would be used against him then. Nevertheless, he was in a mad fury at the manner in which he had been tricked. With unerring instinct, he fastened on Inspector Webster as the prime mover in this extraordinary outcome of Philip Warren's trial. If malice could kill by a look, then the detective should have died forthwith.

Hardinge had no more to say. Walker, puzzled, angry, humiliated by developments for which he was utterly unprepared, asked nothing from the witness, and the court rose for luncheon.

### *Three Men and a Maid*

After a whispered consultation between Mr. Hardinge and the superintendent of police, Philip was told he might accompany his uncle and Marjorie. Ever ready to hold out the olive branch of reconciliation, Marjorie asked her parents to bring Hannah to the hotel where the vicar had engaged a private room for his party, but Jonas and his wife came a few minutes later and said that Hannah was waiting outside the court to speak with Courthope when he appeared.

Philip and his uncle exchanged glances, but no word was spoken. They were aware of events taking place elsewhere, but they were pledged to secrecy, even where Marjorie was concerned.

When the court reassembled, neither James nor Bennett was to be seen, and proceedings were delayed somewhat while the magistrates, their clerk, Mr. Webster, and the legal gentlemen engaged in the case, held a consultation in a room apart.

When they appeared, it was manifest that some unusually important decision had been arrived at. Mr. Whitaker announced that he proposed to offer no further evidence against Philip, and Mr. Hardinge put his client in the box to ask him a few formal questions. These tended to show that while Philip did not deny he fought Robert Courthope for Marjorie's hand, the contest resolved itself into a harmless trial of skill, as he was by far more adept with the rapier than his adversary. He explained briefly how the loss of his ring had disconcerted him, how he kept faithfully to the compact made with his victor, and how he had lived in Fennell's Tower for many days in absolute ignorance of the hue-and-cry raised for him.

## *In Court*

The chairman deemed it incumbent to lecture Philip on the folly of engaging in such a dangerous escapade, pointed out how it had unwittingly led to the perpetration of a terrible crime, and dismissed the charge, which was framed under an obsolete statute.

The magistrates rose and vanished through their special doorway. To all outward semblance, the Hudston tragedy was wrapped in greater mystery than ever. But already some inkling of the strange truth had penetrated the bucolic brain, and to Hannah's strained ears had come dreadful phrases.

"Both of 'em arrested!"

"James Courthope killed him!"

"And Bennett knew!"

"A terrible business!"

"They say that 'tec frae Lunnon is a fair wonder."

"I s'pose he had this up his sleeve all the time."

Hannah sat with her clenched hands pressed against her brows, and the tearless agony of her face might have moved any heart. It assuredly touched Marjorie's, and the girl was going to her sister when Mr. Isambard, warned by Webster, restrained her.

"Hannah is not responsible for her actions," he whispered. "Do not go near her. She might injure you."

At that moment, as if she was conscious of their thoughts, Hannah turned and looked at Marjorie. For once, the younger woman felt sorely afraid. She shrank away, trembling. Hannah did not speak. She maintained that steady, lambent malediction of the eyes, and none could doubt that she meditated a swift and merciless vengeance on one whom she held responsible for the downfall of all her hopes and schemes.

### *Three Men and a Maid*

Webster, skilled observer of human passions, was rendered anxious by Hannah's tigerish glare. He was wrapped up in this story of love and hate, far more intimately than was his wont. If he could help it, his successful unraveling of the threads which bound the fate of Robert Courthope should not give cause for the commission of another and even more unnatural crime.

It was hopeless to appeal to Jonas or Martha, so he went swiftly and placed himself at Hannah's side, thus preventing her from seeing Marjorie again, as Philip was leading the terrified girl away.

"I advise you to make the best of your loss, Miss Neyland," he said quietly. "I can assure you that James Courthope would never have married you. He is a mean hound, for all his grand airs. To gain his own ends, he would not have hesitated to kill you as relentlessly as he killed his cousin."

Hannah listened, but she might have been stricken dumb by grief and rage, for no word escaped her. She raised herself wearily, passed out of the court, and hurried off in the direction of the railway station.

Webster, after making sure of her flight, followed the others, and led Mr. Isambard on one side.

"If you value the life of your nephew's promised bride, you will not allow her to return to the Greyhound Hotel," he said.

The vicar understood him without further explanation.

"It is a sad thing to say, but I have that fear myself. What is to be done? Cannot Hannah be restrained in some way?"

"That is where the law is powerless, Mr. Isambard. We cannot put our belief into a lunacy order. The fact

### *In Court*

remains that Miss Marjorie is in real danger, and she must be rescued."

"But how?"

"Let your nephew marry her by special license, and, meanwhile, send her to the house of a relative or friend where none can find her save those whom you trust implicitly."

## CHAPTER XX

### SHOWING HOW ROBERT COURTHOPE DIED

So it was settled that way. A lady from Nutworth, a friend of the vicar's, accompanied the weeping girl on a long journey by train to the wilds of Westmoreland, bearing a letter of introduction from Mr. Isambard to a clerical friend, to whose care he confidently entrusted Marjorie.

Philip, at first, fought against her going; he argued that a special marriage license would be available more readily at Hudston than at Grasmere. But Webster was adamant, and he even insisted that there should be no letters sent through the post-office until Philip himself hied him westward with the precious document which should give him the privilege of having Marjorie ever at his side.

Probably, the detective's fears were justified. Hannah went home; she managed to regain some control of her senses before she passed through the village. Thus, there was nothing remarkable in her request that the local green-grocer, who was a sporting character, should lend her father a few cartridges, as he wished to shoot some troublesome rabbits which raided the cabbages, and he had run short of ammunition. The man made up a parcel of a dozen, which Hannah pocketed. Then

## *Showing How Robert Courthope Died*

she hurried to the hotel, evaded Aunt Margaret's questioning, and locked herself in her bedroom, which was situated in the gable end of the house, and overlooked the village street for a considerable distance. Here she was seen by several people before the light failed, sitting near the open window, and apparently waiting for some one to pass.

Soon the village folk came to know of the extraordinary proceedings at Nutworth. Men began to saunter into the Greyhound, while others, mostly women and children, congregated on the road, the hotel being a center of interest for eager eyes and gossiping tongues, but Hannah sat unmoved, watching and waiting.

Jonas and Martha returned to Hudston in a dog-cart, and Martha, poor mother of daughters so completely unlike herself, came knocking at Hannah's door, imploring her to join the family at tea.

"I'm not hungry, mother," was the calm response. "At any rate, I'll bide until Marjorie comes."

"But that's no use, honey," pleaded the mother. "She'll likely go to the vicarage, an' she may not be home until late."

"Never mind. Don't wait for me. I'm all right. I've had rather a bad day, but to-morrow things may be better."

That was all the sight or sound Martha could obtain of her until the hotel was closed for the night. Then Hannah came down-stairs.

"It looks as though Marjorie is not going to favor us with her company," she said to Jonas, searching his face with eyes that glittered unnaturally.

Jonas was vexed with Hannah for her unreasoning



### *Three Men and a Maid*

hatred of her sister. He was not a tactful man at any time, and he was less disposed now than ever to quake before his eldest daughter's unruly temper.

"Happen not," he said, "seein' as how she's sent me a letter to say that she has gone away, but hopes to see us all again in a few days."

"Gone to London?" was the laconic question.

"I dunno. It fair bangs me, it does, all this flyin' here an' there, and worry about nowt."

"Where is the letter?"

"What has it te do wi' you?" he cried roughly. "You've turned the house upside down ever since she kem home. Small wonder the lass is feared to bide here."

"Afraid, is she? But she won't be afraid in London. She is a lady, you know, and the air of London will agree with her. Has she gone there?"

"No."

"Is her hiding-place a secret, then?"

"Ay, she trusts none of us, more's the pity."

Jonas had blurted out the cause of his phenomenal ill-humor. He was conscious that when Marjorie needed his support it was withheld, and he had backed up Hannah's effort to domineer the household. Now he regretted his mistake. Like all converts, his new-born zeal was excessive, nor could he see that Hannah was hardly in her right mind.

"I am going out," she announced suddenly.

"What? At this time?" cried her father, sheepishly amazed at his own firmness.

"Yes. If Marjorie can stay away at will, surely I may go out for half an hour? And it has only just struck ten."

## *Showing How Robert Courthope Died*

"It's main cauld, an' like te snow," he protested, but, finding no valid reason for barring her exit, he unbolted the front door.

"Marcy on us, lass, d'ye not need yer hat an' jacket," he shouted, as Hannah flew past him. He heard the quick patter of her feet on the frosty road. It was a still night, and he made out easily that she was hammering at the door of the inn where Inspector Webster had his quarters.

"Now what in the name o' goodness does she want wi' *him*?" muttered Jonas, wistfully, and, indeed, the detective had somewhat the same thought when told that the elder Miss Neyland wished urgently to see him.

He led her into the deserted bar parlor. Knowing that there were unseen listeners, he said instantly:

"I suppose you have nothing of a really private nature to communicate, Miss Neyland? Otherwise, I will come with you to the Greyhound."

"I only wish to know where Marjorie is," she answered.

"I cannot tell you."

"You mean that you will not tell me?"

"No. I really do not know. Her friends thought that she had better be removed from all the scandal and publicity which to-day's excitement will evoke. I did not inquire where she was going. I preferred to remain in ignorance."

"Why?"

"Because then I could answer such questions as yours quite honestly."

Mr. Webster's statements were strictly and literally true. He had asked Mr. Isambard not to name Marjorie's new address until he, Webster, wanted it. He

### *Three Men and a Maid*

tried to impart a lightness to his words and manner which should gloss over Hannah's untimely call, hoping he might persuade her that he was blind to her motives.

She turned towards the door.

"Shall I escort you?" he said.

"No. Hudston has no terrors for me. But I want to make an offer, a fair offer. Obtain Marjorie's address for me, and, within twenty-four hours, I will tell you something you want to know."

He glanced towards the inner bar, which was deserted, and lowered his voice.

"Tell me now," he said, "and I will do my best for you in the morning."

At another time, Hannah would have laughed the subterfuge to scorn. But laughter, even the sad mirth of a disordered mind, had gone from her for ever. She merely opened the door, and hastened back to the hotel as quickly as she had quitted it.

Webster, like Jonas, stood at the door, but his reflections were more cogent than the innkeeper's. He resumed the cigar which he had suspended when Hannah's name was brought to him.

"I am more than ever pleased with myself for sending Marjorie away," he thought. "If only I were allowed to publish the inner history of this affair, what a clever fellow I could make myself out to be!" He returned to his sitting-room, chose another cigar, cut the end off so that he need not lose a second when its predecessor was done with — for the long morning in court had greatly interfered with the day's consumption of tobacco — and set his wits to work.

"That young woman is bent on adding to the mischief

### *Showing How Robert Courthope Died*

which this wretched little village seems to hatch so promptly," he thought. "Now, what can she tell me that I *want to know* — something so important, in her estimation, that it would justify me in allowing her to follow and attempt to kill her sister? That pleasing idea is everything to Hannah just now. Therefore, that which she offers as a bribe must bulk almost equally in her mind. Let us take the obvious thing first. In all likelihood, she saw James deliver that assassin's stroke to the panting Robert. Would she give James to the hangman to gratify her hate of Marjorie? Surely not! Poor creature! She loves that skunk. Both sisters are alike in one respect — they have a fine capacity for loving. Then what is it that ranks next?"

Dispensing with such a tedious accessory as a match, he lit the new cigar from the glowing red of the old one.

"Is she going to come and swear that she saw Warren stab Courthope? Had she done that at first, Warren would be in a tight place. Now, it is too late. The 'underlying motive,' as the chairman put it, is perfectly clear. By gad! did she —"

The second alternative was so staggering that he refused to permit it to take form in his brain. Nevertheless, as the homely phrase declares, he went hot and cold all over, a somewhat difficult and complex operation which, in the present instance, demanded the immediate swallowing of a tonic.

"By gad!" he said again, when he dared to think. But he managed to smile at the monster his imagination had created. He was vain of his professional skill. Not willingly would he admit that he had blundered.

"Of course, that's all nonsense," he told himself.

### *Three Men and a Maid*

"Poor Hannah! She is wild over her loss, and we know that James treated her infamously. Whatever his guilt, she ought to be his wife now. And she would say anything to clear him, even at the twelfth hour."

In cheerier mood, he took from the drawer containing the plans and toy soldiers a long, narrow box which bore the seals of postal registration. It was addressed to him, and he had opened the package previously, but he placed it on the table and drew from the inside a rapier. The blade was dull, stained with chemicals, and slightly rusted.

As Philip had assured him most positively that the sword found in Robert's body was his, Philip's, it followed that this sword, discovered by Webster himself, on the third day after the murder, plunged up to the hilt in the clay of the river bank quite a hundred yards from Lancault Church, was the weapon which had fallen from the lifeless hand of the unfortunate Squire.

The detective's trained art had stopped him from withdrawing the rapier at once from its earthy sheath. He obtained a spade, and disinterred it, taking infinite pains to secure every particle of soil that adhered to the steel. As the result, a report from the Government analyst was now in his pocket. The laboratory had revealed that the point of the blade and some few grains of earth bore chemical traces of the blood of a mammal. Beyond that the expert could not go, but Webster knew that he held in his hand the sword which had wounded Warren and snapped his ring.

"I wish you could speak, my friend," he thought, as the supple steel bent under his fingers. "Yet I am sure no woman's hand thrust you so firmly into your hiding-place. Even were I mistaken, Hannah Neyland would

## *Showing How Robert Courthope Died*

never have endured the suspense of not visiting your retreat to make sure you were safe. But James is strong. He knows when to be forgetful. James sleeps well o' nights. Perhaps he may be restless this evening, after to-day's eye-opener. I must get Scarlett for the prosecution. Scarlett will hang him."

Comforted by the memories of the way in which that redoubtable Treasury barrister had fitted the noose on many a wriggling neck, Webster went to bed.

Fortunately for his well-being next day, he rose early, and breakfasted before eight o'clock, because it is reasonably certain that he would not have enjoyed his Yorkshire ham and eggs with his usual good appetite had he first received a letter which reached him by a mounted constable as he was on the point of beginning to write a comprehensive statement of the causes which led to Robert Courthope's death.

In fact, it may be said that the famous detective was unnerved by that letter. For once, he neither smoked nor nibbled his mustache. It is probable he would have been far less moved were he told that all his modest savings were swept away in some bank failure. He was not a rich man, because Scotland Yard officials often spend money out of their own pockets which the service does not refund, but he could always make a living while his health lasted, so the loss of his few hundreds would not be an irreparable calamity. This letter dealt him a shrewder blow — it struck at his pride, and the injury was not mitigated by the knowledge that he had been afraid to guess the truth overnight.

It was written by James Courthope, and was dated 6 A.M. that day. It ran:

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"DEAR MR. WEBSTER, — I find that confinement in a cell conduces to clear thinking. Hence, as you have no valid charge against me, and can hardly wish to keep me in prison unnecessarily, I have disturbed your friend, the superintendent, at a somewhat chilly hour, and sought his permission to send you a plain and convincing statement of recent events. You are a man of the judicial habit. Pray judge me impartially.

"I need not tell you that Philip Warren did not kill my cousin, Robert. Nor did I. Robert was stabbed by Hannah Neyland. She is a headstrong, vindictive, narrow-minded woman, whose jealousy and ambition have brought me to ruin. I have passed the night in weighing the pros and cons of a difficult situation, and I find no good reason why I should continue to shield her wrong-doing. I may be held in error for remaining silent hitherto. That is for you and others to determine — my own conscience is clear, and candor now will supply my deficiencies in other directions.

"I do not propose to enter into any details of the quarrel between Warren and my cousin. I had nothing to do with it, and Warren will bear me out that I advised him to leave the village, warned him that Robert meant mischief, and generally did my utmost to prevent the two from meeting. Notwithstanding all my efforts, however, they met, and arranged the duel. I suspected there was some explanation of my headstrong cousin's calmness during the afternoon of the day passed by Warren in Lancault Church. When he left the Court at eight o'clock, the night being stormy, with moonlit breaks, I followed him, wondering what was going to happen. I saw him enter the ruins, and speak to Warren. He wrote something on a sheet of paper with a fountain pen given him by Warren. I crept to the rear of the church, admittedly intending to listen to what took place. Then, to my amazement, I found that the stick which Robert appeared to be carrying was really a foil. Mind you, I say a foil. Not until the fight was ended did I discover that it was a rapier. They stripped off their coats and

## *Showing How Robert Courthope Died*

waistcoats and began to fence. They had done the same thing hundreds of times for amusement. I could not realize, in the dim light, that they were engaging in an actual duel. Warren is an idealist, Robert was somewhat of the same order in a crude way, just as the modern pugilist who refuses to hit a man when he is down is akin to the knight errant. I saw nothing unreasonable in the assumption that they had decided to fight for Marjorie, with foils, and I was glad of it, feeling sure that Warren would win. I wanted him to win. Robert would marry no other woman, he would drink harder than ever, and I was his heir. My motives may not rank high in ethics, but they were not criminal.

"Well, they fought, fought like devils, and Warren was winning. Being undefended by masks, gloves, leather jackets, or aprons, they bled a little, but the india-rubber tips on the ends of their foils might easily cause nasty scratches. Not being cast in the heroic mold myself, I could not believe that two men would assault each other with naked steel with such fiendish skill, determination, and indifference to death. At last, during the passing of a cloud over the moon, something seemed to happen to Warren — was it the loss of that cursed ring? — which obviously handicapped him, even in my untrained eye. Soon, he was disarmed, and Robert pinned him against the west wall. Some broken talk passed. I gathered that Warren was held to a compact made previously; he resisted, and, half mad with losing the contest, flung himself bodily against Robert, who fell underneath him. Then Warren leaped up, and ran off like a madman. Now, mark my mental condition at that moment. I was carried out of myself by the fury of the combatants. I was almost as exhausted with excitement as Robert himself. Moreover, I shared in Warren's defeat. If Robert won, he would marry Marjorie sooner or later, and I had strained my wits to cracking in order to bring about a marriage between Warren and Marjorie. So, here was I, beaten by ill-luck, with my prospects of succeeding to the Edenhurst estates practically extinguished.



### *Three Men and a Maid.*

Excellent arguments these, you may say, for helping cousin Robert to a more peaceful world, far removed from the stress and fume of this life. Nevertheless, I had no more intention of killing Robert then, than I have now of going to the scaffold in a quixotic spirit of self-sacrifice. I cannot help it. I am built that way. I shudder at killing anything, let alone a man, and especially if that man happens to be myself.

"But, to resume. While I was striving to evolve order out of the chaos of my mind, and listening to Robert breathing like a blown hunter, I was startled, stricken dumb and motionless, by the spirit-like appearance of Hannah. She rose out of the gloom behind the east wall like some witch of the night. Whether she was there before the fight began, or came on the scene during its progress, I know not. But her extraordinary deed, and the manner of it, drove all other considerations from my brain. She raced across the uneven floor, picked up Warren's sword, and deliberately plunged it into Robert's breast. He groaned, groaned horribly. It must be a vile thing to see and feel death, and be helpless. Then, for the first time, did I actually become aware that the fencers had used rapiers and not foils.

"I watched Hannah as a fascinated bird is said to watch a snake. By her action, that which had seemed to be a somewhat high-flown method of determining the recipient of a lady's favors was fearfully changed into a downright murder. She did not seem to realize that I might be in Lancault, and here let me interpolate that I have never since spoken to her of the incidents of that ghastly night. I even go so far as to state that I think she only stuck the sword into Robert to render Warren's conviction for the crime a certainty. Being a woman, every sword was to her a deadly weapon. I am sure she does not understand the very potent distinction between a foil and a rapier. When questioned, if she admits the truth of my relation, she will probably say that she thought Robert was already slain, the absence of the body armor accounting sufficiently, in her mind, for the difference between the harmless combats of

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other days and this duel to the death. That is only a theory. I put it forward as one of the considerations which kept my mouth closed at the inquest. I began by describing her as headstrong, vindictive, and narrow-minded, and I did not choose those adjectives at random. Hannah would stop at nothing to achieve her ends. She meant to be the lady paramount of Hudston. She wanted to crush her too popular sister, and she never stopped to reflect that I would be a most unlikely person to marry a woman who attained her ends by such drastic means. Of course, she may have fancied that her act would never be known, though why she thought that I was not in the locality it is hard to guess, because it was I who sent her to tell Marjorie where Warren was hidden, so that they might elope together.

"When you come to me, as you doubtless will come very speedily, I can elucidate this speculative side of my story more fully. At present, I must go on with its action. When Warren snatched up his discarded clothes, I believe that a letter fell from a pocket. At any rate, Hannah found one on the pavement. She opened it, and tried to read its contents. She made out sufficient of its nature that she searched Robert's coat, too, and found another similar letter. In her haste and flurry, she must have placed Warren's declaration inside Robert's envelope, because, in her growing fear of the dead man's presence in that dreary place, she dropped one of the two letters, which proved to be Robert's declaration, in Philip's envelope. I came upon it after her departure, and it is now among my papers at the Court. I kept it as a piece of circumstantial evidence — in case of need!

"Then, yielding to sudden panic, she fled.

"At that moment, the very crisis of my life, a strange calmness possessed me. I saw, quite accurately, what a tremendous effect on my wayward fortunes Hannah's vicious stab must exercise. Not only was I my cousin's heir, but (and this led to my undoing) I might be able to secure Marjorie myself. In view of Bennett's arrest, you may shake your head at the

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first of these considerations. Therefore, I now affirm that the business of the will was wholly of his contriving, if, indeed, there has been any fraud in the matter. He is a clever little reptile; he had financed me considerably, not out of love, but because of my reversionary interests. These gone, his money followed suit. Here you have a quite tangible explanation of the suppressed will — granted, I repeat, that Hardinge's cross-examination forshadowed a known fact. But let that wait until we review matters. It was the vista of matrimonial bliss that warped my judgment. I wanted to make it impossible for Warren to marry Marjorie, so I did a clumsy and short-sighted thing — I wiped Robert's sword slightly on his handkerchief, stuffed the linen where it would surely be found, and hid the sword in the bank of the little stream, under some alder bushes southeast of the church. My intent was to cause a hubbub about a murder rather than a duel. I had an indefinite notion that Warren might escape, and, without pretending to an excess of virtue, I should never have allowed him to suffer death for Hannah's madness. Imprisonment? Yes, perhaps, seeing that he crossed my path so unexpectedly afterwards, when my pursuit of Marjorie had become a mania. But not the halter! I could not have endured that.

"Well, I have little more to write. Have I convinced you, I wonder? At any rate, I have assuredly surprised you. I trust you bear me no ill-will for spoiling a *cause célèbre*. Even in its new edition, the Hudston tragedy will make the nation gape. But, candidly, I detest this gaol. Get me out! I shall stand to my guns.

"Yours very sincerely,

"JAMES COURTHOPE."

Enclosed with the letter was a brief note from the superintendent at Nutworth, ending with the question:

"What do you think of it all?"

"I know what I think," growled Webster, when his

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faculties resumed their normal functions. "I think that James Courthope is the biggest —"

Well, what the detective really meant was that he had never read a more callous, plausible, and, in parts, astoundingly candid document in his life.

That Hannah had killed Robert Courthope in the way described he had no doubt whatever. That James meant to throw the whole onus of the suppression of the will on Bennett's shoulders was equally clear. But Webster gratified his annoyance by indulging in a malicious little grin when he reflected on the stubbornness of the legal lion in James's path.

"No, my beauty," he hissed, "the scent is too good for a red herring to be of any use. *You'll* do time all right. *I'll* see to that," and he emphasized the personal pronouns with a spiteful gusto.

But there remained the problem of Hannah. He rose wearily, kicked a chair out of his path, and went downstairs to the waiting constable.

"Go to the Greyhound Hotel," he said, "and ask Miss Hannah Neyland if she will come and see me as soon as possible."

That was the best plan, he thought. Hannah would imagine that he had news of Marjorie for her. He would inveigle her to Nutworth on some pretext, and then, the law must take its course. At any rate, the unhappy girl would be spared the indignity of arrest in her own home, and there was not the slightest chance of her conviction on a more serious charge than manslaughter.

The policeman returned.

"Miss Neyland is not up yet," he said.

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"Hum," muttered Webster. "Didn't one of the maids go to her room?"

"Yes, but the girl said that Miss Hannah must be tired, as there was no answer."

"Wait here," cried the detective, roused to sudden haste. He went to the Greyhound, and found Jonas.

"Go to your daughter's bedroom and awaken her," he said. "I want to see her. Tell her I have a message from James Courthope for her."

It could not be helped. The hotel was in an uproar before they forced the lock of that silent room in the gable. Hannah, fully dressed, was lying on the bed. She had poisoned herself with arsenic, which Jonas kept in the house for treating horse ailments.

She, too, had passed the night in thought, and thought had mastered reason. Unlike James Courthope, she was faithful to the end. She had written and signed a few words, and what she said deserves at least the commendation of those who know what it means to be torn and harried by an all-powerful passion.

"I meant to kill my sister," she wrote, "but that would not save the man I love. And Marjorie never really injured me. It was fate. Who can struggle against fate? I killed Robert Courthope. I did not know I had killed him until I heard the doctors at the inquest. I believe James knew I had done it, but he never said a word. Perhaps he has loved me all the time, and is ready now to die in order to save me. But I cannot let him suffer. He is innocent. He must be set at liberty. I killed Robert, by sticking a sword into him. It was Warren's sword, and I only meant to show everybody who had done it, because I was sure the Squire was dead after the

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fight. There were other things I didn't understand, about the letters and the missing sword. That is why I believe James knew about me. James, dear, don't grieve for me. I acted for the best, but I was all wrong. I hope I am doing right now, for your sake."

Seeing that this story of human love and suffering has been brought to a close by two letters of tragic import, it may be well to place on record one other missive, in which a cheerier tone is found. The writer is Mr. Inspector Webster, and the date is nearly two years after the York Webster Assizes held subsequently to Hannah's death. It runs:

"DEAR MR. WARREN. — I was very pleased to receive such a kind message from Mrs. Warren and yourself. I shall certainly avail myself of your hospitality next month, as I am very fond of rabbit-shooting. I suppose that by nature I am something of a ferret — hence my hostility to rabbits. I carried out your commission yesterday. The officials at Portland gave the men my letter, and they both called on me after arriving in London. They look uncommonly well. I have noticed that fact so often in regard to discharged convicts that I am forced to the conclusion that our penal settlements are really first-rate health resorts. James Courthope professed to be overwhelmed by Mrs. Warren's goodness in giving him such a handsome annuity; but he is a rogue at heart, and I am glad there is a stipulation that he leave the country. Of course, he is a clever man, and, if he keeps straight, he may get on well in South America. At any rate, you have behaved splendidly to him, far better than he deserves. As for Bennett, your gift will enable him to look about for work, and he will find plenty. London has a large supply of shady solicitors, who only employ sharps of their own kidney.

"I have been engaged recently on a fine case, the impersonation of a dead man by a woman. Nothing has appeared in the papers as yet, and may never do so, but it puzzled me for six months. So, for one evening, at least, I promise to keep Mrs. Warren, you, and the vicar interested.

"With all good wishes for the New Year, and the hope that I may

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soon roam over that wonderful moor of yours in an unprofessional capacity, I remain,

“Yours very sincerely,

“FREDERIC J. WEBSTER.”

Oddly enough, when Mr. Webster arrived in Hudston, he took Felix into the churchyard one morning, and asked to be shown Hannah's grave. To his surprise, he found a very beautiful wreath deposited there. Its flowers, imported from the South of France, aroused his curiosity, and he questioned the sexton.

“Ay,” said the man, “it kem frae Lunnon. Mrs. Warren often brings flowers, but this is t'first I've had frae Lunnon.”

Webster smoked vigorously in silence for some minutes. Then he snapped his fingers and growled:

“It may be yours, James. If it is, you have softened a bit, but you have a rogue's heart, all the same. And, if it hadn't been for that poor girl lying there, I would have hanged you — sure thing. And I would have done right, too. For you killed Robert Courthope. The hand was the hand of Hannah, but the voice was the voice of James.”

THE END





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